SHAKESPEARE PERSONALLY

DAVID MASSON

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BY

DAVID MASSON

EDITED AND ARRANGED BY ROSALINE MASSON

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LONDON
SMITH, ELDER & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1914

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Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.
At the Ballantyne Press, Edinburgh

PREFACE

THIS book contains the "Shakespeare Lectures" which always formed part of my father's course delivered during his tenancy of the Chair of English Literature at Edinburgh University. This period occupied the years from his appointment to the Chair in 1865 until his resignation of it in 1895, and during those thirty years he constantly revised and added to these lectures: they may therefore be regarded as containing the substance of his lifelong study of, and thoughts concerning, Shakespeare.

It was his own wish, expressed shortly before his death, that they might be published. I have therefore revised and arranged them for this purpose.

I have to express my thanks to Professor

Gilray, of the University of Otago, Dunedin, who was formerly my father's Assistant in Edinburgh, for very kindly copying for me some extracts from his note-books; Professor Gregory Smith, of Belfast University, who was my father's Assistant during the last years of his professorship, for his kindness in supplying me with the tabular form of the headings in the lectures as they were delivered at that time; and the Reverend Dr. Kelman for lending me, for reference, the note-books containing the notes he took when he was a student in the class.

ROSALINE MASSON.

EDINBURGH, *February* 1914.

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SHAKESPEARE PERSONALLY

CHAPTER I

ON BIOGRAPHY IN GENERAL, AND SHAKESPEARE'S IN PARTICULAR

If by *existence* we mean not merely the act of appearing bodily in the world during a certain time, but also the bequeathing of a train of influences visibly affecting the whole subsequent course of things, and especially the thoughts of men, then no man of the modern world can be said to have *existed* more largely than Shakespeare.

For a long while there has been a universal agreement on this point. It only remained, indeed, that there should be paid to Shakespeare that extreme compliment which it seems to be the whim of human nature to pay, at some time or other, to each one of those few personages of the past the dimensions of

whose existence have approached the enormous. The whim is that enormously great existence is inconceivable except as non-existence. When the existence of any man has been surpassingly great, when an unusual amount of the energy that has actuated human history hitherto is represented by his name, it seems as if the sensation could be best expressed by saying that he never existed at all. Even this supreme compliment, reserved for the very highest and greatest, has been paid to Shakespeare. He, in his turn, has been made out to be a myth. We *have* the so-called Shakespeare Plays and Poems, and all that has been accumulated round them in the shape of commentaries, interpretations, criticism, discussions, and suggested fancies and philosophisings innumerable; but at the heart of all this vast cocoon of tradition there is not, and never was, any one real man, any competent originating personality!

Who says so? The discovery, it seems, was made simultaneously, years ago, by divers persons. Chief among these, however, if not the sole original discoverer, was an American

lady, Miss Delia Bacon. She is worth remembering yet. The story of her life is perhaps unmatched for tragical, and yet also comical, significance in the annals of Shakespeare-worship. Few stories that I have read are more impressive than that of this poor American lady, Shakespeare-smitten to the core from her youth up, but in whom (the trivial suggestion of her own name perhaps contributing one item to her phantasy) the worship of Shakespeare had taken the peculiar form of a denial of his existence; of this lady leaving all—country, home, and friends—in the pursuit of her idea. Drawn at length by an irresistible magnetism to the one spot on earth most consecrated to Shakespeare's memory, she illustrated there by the wreck of her reason the crushing reality even yet of that existence which she denied. One can fancy that night in the church at Stratford—the insane woman stooping, lantern in hand, in eager quest over the grave, the bones actually beneath as they had been laid two hundred and fifty years before, and the calm face of the marble Shakespeare looking down unmoved.

But the story is significant in many ways. The theory of the non-personality of Shakespeare, it might have been hoped, would have died with Miss Delia Bacon. At all events, that reverence for earnest and gifted lunacy which in her case justified a certain toleration of the theory, will hardly protect from contempt such would-be eccentrics as may seek to revive it. There is a limit to the degree of re-iteration of nonsense with which the world of letters ought to consent to be troubled. But the application of the story may be extended. What have we all been doing—we the orthodox believers in an actual Shakespeare who wrote the Plays and Poems—the critics of him, the biographers of him, the essayists on himself, his art, his philosophy? What but, in metaphor at least, stooping over his grave with the insane lady, wondering what it really contains, and trying to flash some faint light from our lanterns upon the features of his bust?

According to the general opinion, we have made wondrously little of our study after all. Some people go on quoting, as no less true now than when it was written, the saying of

the commentator Steevens—that "all that we know of Shakespeare is that he was born at Stratford-on-Avon; married and had children there; went to London, where he commenced actor, and wrote plays and poems; returned to Stratford, made his will, and died." This, which was not true, save by way of epigram, when it was written, is certainly untrue now. It is only the inherent sheepishness of people in all matters of literature, the tendency always to go on saying at the same spot anything that has once been said at that spot before, that has perpetuated the saying. Still the complaint, even among those most versed in Shakespeare literature, is that, after all our researches, we know marvellously little of Shakespeare himself, of his real look and gesture in the world. He is still, it is said, far more of a mere name to us, and less of a distinct image, than any of his eminent contemporaries.

In my opinion, the complaint, even so modified, is still exaggerated. We do not know so many particulars of Shakespeare's life as we should like to know. But we know a good many. It is the fault of our own dulness of

conception if we do not derive a tolerably clear idea of the course of Shakespeare's life from any of those ordinary recent memoirs of him in which the facts now authentically known are pieced together. But the mystery has been attacked also, where it ought to have been attacked long ago, from the inner side. Despite that peculiarly English scepticism, rooted in distaste for speculation of any sort, which would discountenance all attempts to get at traits of Shakespeare through his writings—a scepticism strangely rife among the grubbers after external Shakespearian information, and visibly unfitting them for their own work, inasmuch as it makes their grubbing unintelligent—there have yet been excellent attempts of the kind on both sides of the Atlantic. These attempts, I believe, have led to sound and true and permanent results. Say what people will, a good deal about Shakespeare himself has been definitely ascertained by that method which is surely the most natural in the study of any man whose career has been that of authorship—the interpretation of his own writings.

Certainly, however, more may be found out by the competent use of this method, in alliance with the external method. Certainly, too, all the knowledge of Shakespeare already acquired and yet attainable by both methods has yet to be organised into a fitting biography. After all that has been done, the problem of Shakespeare's character, his personal cast of mind and conduct, remains the most subtle and difficult, and the farthest yet from a perfect, or even moderately satisfactory, solution, among the vexed questions of English literature.

But why make a problem of it? Why not go on in comfort reading our Shakespeare, and enjoying him as much as may be—and how much that is let everyone for himself lay his hand on his heart and say—without troubling ourselves about the real William Shakespeare? What does it matter whether the Stratford bust is anything like him, whether he was dark or fair, tall or middle-sized, whether he and Mrs. Shakespeare got on well together or but so-so, whether he was cheerful or moody o' mornings, what he liked to eat and whether he ever dined with Francis Bacon, what kind

of private philosophy he had, what were his political reflexions during Elizabeth's reign or in James's, and how he stood related to the Puritans? In blessed ignorance of all this, may we not have the full enjoyment of all that Shakespeare himself meant the world to have from him—his character, his wit and humour, his lyrics, his wealth of dramatically-expressed thought, his poetic phantasies and creations? Cannot we be content with Shakespeare in his public and only self-transmuted capacity as Poet or Artist, to be read for what he is worth, without raking among the circumstances of his actual life, or trying to probe back through the poetry to the personality it marks?

In this kind of arguing—not at all uncommon in certain quarters—we see the action of a spirit which would, I think, were it prevalent, greatly impoverish our literature, and take all sap and virtue out of our ideas of Art. I may call it the Anti-Biographical spirit. At its utmost it would abolish Biography of every degree and kind, and, consequently, History too, as hitherto understood. It would forbid the story of men's characters and lives

altogether. What a man has transmuted of himself, whether in the form of thoughts or of actions, what of him is still working in the rolling medley of things—that is all of him the world has to do with! His own life and behaviour, the physiognomy with which he faced his fellows, the little nest of circumstances within which he performed his round of waking, sleeping, dreaming, struggling, and producing—all this is the perished husk! Let it lie where it fell, unvisited and unremembered, till the mere winds moulder it and its shreds are dust! At all events, in the case of poets, artists, men of letters generally, men whose business was that of meditation and speculation, what right have we, possessing as we do the bequests they intended to be their acquittance with posterity, to move previous questions as to their habits while they lived, and the forms and shocks of event and feeling out of which these tasks took origin? Where lives have been *public*, indeed—when it is with a warrior, or a statesman, or the leader of a political revolution that we have to do—then there *may* be a limited right of biograph-

ical research! But a poet, of all men! Is not inquisitiveness into his history, into the latent circumstances and stimulants amid which he exercised his craft of mere imagining and inventing, irrelevant and sacrilegious? The published fruits of the exercise of his craft, the poems that in succession detached themselves from his teeming mind, and that have floated to us in independent distinctness down the stream of Time—these are ours! They are to affect us as they may, and to be criticised by us on their own merits, according to the best canons we have of what is good in this or in that kind of Art. But the personality out of which these poems grew and from which they were detached—that is *not* ours! It was the poet's own, not to be accounted for to us, but to be returned, with its vouchers all sealed up, to the Universal Father and Judge.

Now, so far as this distaste for Biography arises from a perception of the extreme difficulty of getting at the truth about men's lives, or a resentment of the uncertainty, the featureless largeness of mere eulogy, or again the narrow-mindedness, the delight in trivial anec-

dote and gossip, the sexton-like spite in disagreeable particulars, that characterise much of extant Biography, there may be a wholesome effect from this temporary blast among us of the Anti-Biographic spirit. But the right effect can only be to exalt and justify Biography. Founded deep as it is in the instincts and cravings of human nature, and defensible on all grounds of science, of social right, and of moral expediency, this form of literature can never be extinguished, but only improved, regulated, enriched, and extended. With due care, caution, and perseverance, facts *are* to be found out about the lives and characters of dead men—facts, as exact, sure, and tractable as any other facts. And, if such facts are recoverable, are they not worth recovering? Is it not as interesting, as useful, to recover some image of the demeanour of an important human being who lived long ago as to reconstruct the material form of an extinct animal from its fossil? The lives of all that have lived do, by the mere fact of their having affected the whole by the tremor of their existence, belong to Humanity. *They* had the right of

concealment, but Humanity has the contrary right of detection. Let Humanity exert that right to the utmost; and surely—unless that Spirit of God about which we prate has been absent persistently from the rational succession, and all our admirations and commemorations of virtue and nobleness in men are a mere pretence—at least *some* lives will be found that will stand the investigation, some that will teach and rebuke by their grandeur even in the fullest blaze. Others, though they may require charity, may stand the investigation partly. They may reveal the divine in fits and flashes. And what though, in these last or in others, strange things should appear, and there should be shocks and incongruities? Ere the world comes to an end, registration may be co-extensive with existence. Whatever is or happens may leave its record or photograph; and, all being turned inside out like a glove, shame will be either impossible or universal.

Not only in the interest of Biography itself, but in the interests also of Literature generally, of Art and Art-criticism, must the Anti-Biographical spirit be resisted. Disconnect our

impressions of remarkable poems, or other works of Art, or even of doctrinal treatises and systems of speculative thought—disconnect these from our knowledge of their authors, or our desire for knowledge of them, and our Literary Criticism, our whole theory of Literature, degenerates into dilettantism. It is by recognising in every book the product of some mind, situated in such and such a manner, moved by such and such an aim, that we do justice to books. It is by recognising every powerful passage in a poem as originally the throb of some heart, and every strain of melody or picture of beauty in it as the transmission of what was first a song in some ear, or a visual phantasy delighting some eye, that we reach the true depths of minute critical relish. It is right that poems should be criticised according to the abstract or generalised principles of excellence in the different kinds of poetry—epic, lyrical, or dramatic; and much may be done in this way. But not till every poem has been, as it were, chased up to the moment of its organic origin, and resolved into the mood, or intention, or constitutional

reverie, out of which it sprang, will its import be adequately felt or understood. An imagination may be detached from the mind that fashioned it, and sent on loose and by itself, to encounter whomsoever it can and take its chance of pleasing them. But, even in the case of such a nameless waif of beauty, the reader refers instinctively to some specific, though unknown, conditions of its origin, and gains an interest in a person for whom the sole predicate is the feeling the waif has occasioned.

It is a fact, indeed, that our Literary Criticism has always been deepest and richest when there has been a large interfusion of the expressly biographical with the critical. Whatever improvement there has been of our Literary Criticism in Britain of late, especially in respect of depth, we owe to this cause.

On all grounds, therefore, such an inquiry as that the consideration of which has led to these remarks ought to be encouraged. That desire to know something about Shakespeare personally which has long been a craving of more than European dimensions, and has already prompted so much laborious research

and so many ingenious critical investigations, is not only natural and creditable in itself, but perhaps involves, in its unabated perseverance, results of high collateral interest. The very difficulty of the problem recommends it. In prosecuting a biographical problem of such extreme subtlety and difficulty, it cannot be but that questions a little out of the common track will be stirred, and new devices in the art of investigating character will have to be tried, so that our present somewhat crude calculus for this peculiar class of problems may incidentally receive improvement. Be that as it may, there can be no harm in once again arresting ourselves on the skirts of this vast and still persisting accumulation of thought respecting Shakespeare—of such bulk now in the whole modern world of civilisation that none of us can escape beyond its boundaries if we would—and asking in what actual life it originated, and what exact organism is still at the heart of it.

For the thousandth time, therefore, What do we know, or may we know, of Shakespeare personally?

For the thousandth time also, the answer to this question must be attempted in two ways; for respecting Shakespeare, as respecting any man of the past whose mode of activity was that of literature, there are two sources of information—the *external*, consisting in the recorded particulars of his life and in authentic notices of him by contemporaries; and the *internal*, consisting in his own writings.

CHAPTER II

SHAKESPEARE FROM THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCES

SHAKESPEARE'S life, in respect of external circumstances, divides itself into three parts or stages:

I. 1564–1586 (?): ætat.–22 (?) *Stratford-on-Avon.*
II. 1586 (?)–1604 (?): ætat. 22 (?)–40 (?) *London.*
III. 1604 (?)–1616: ætat. 40 (?)–52. *Stratford-on-Avon again.*

This, with some uncertainty as to the particular years that are queried, is the authentic map, summary, or ground-plan of Shakespeare's life, as it emerges from the records. It is a very simple and natural English life—a life of three stages. But what a superstructure, what a filling up!

The first stage may be passed over with this abridgment of its details—that the early days of the poet were spent in or about his native town in Warwickshire, that he was educated

pretty well at the grammar-school there, and that it is among the circumstances of that town that he is to be conceived as mooning in some dim way, and educating himself or being educated, until the misfortunes of his father, an ex-mayor of the town, his own too hasty marriage at the age of eighteen with a woman eight years his senior, and the birth of three children by this marriage, obliged him, when he was only about two-and-twenty, to migrate to London. He connected himself with one of the theatres there, leaving his family meanwhile at Stratford, to be visited as often as he could ride down, *via* Oxford, to see them. It was a good two days' journey.

Thus began that second period, during which London was continuously Shakespeare's headquarters, and he is to be conceived mainly as moving amid the bustle of that capital, with its population of some 200,000 souls. Lastly, that, when still in the prime of manhood, he retired from London back to his native place, and that here he spent mainly the last years of his life, and died in 1616, when he had just attained his fifty-third year, might be ex-

pressed—not without the touch of the feeling proper in the contemplation of such a simple and natural English ending of a life—by the phrase, "*Stratford-on-Avon again.*"

That some of the dates must be left hazy, or with a query appended, does not affect the material truth of the scheme, which, with all allowances, grasps well the life of Shakespeare as a whole. It lays down the life in outline.

What little has been ascertained of Shakespeare during the first period, may be summed up in the statement that Shakespeare spent his childhood and youth in Stratford, was a husband and the father of a family at an unusually early age, but found himself uncomfortably situated, and migrated to London.

The conceptions we gain of Shakespeare's life during its later stages may be expressed best in a series of statements.

Shakespeare's life, from the time of his arrival in London, and thence onward to the end, was one of great literary industry. As the result, all in all, of Shakespeare's literary life, from its presumed beginning in 1586 to

its end in 1616, we have the present total of his thirty-seven accepted Plays—averaging, when distributed, more than a Play a year—together with his non-dramatic Poems. It is a total entitling Shakespeare to that character of "voluminousness" which Scott, who certainly had it too, justly recognises, in the preface to one of his novels, as common to most of those whom the world remembers as its greatest writers. For, though high *quality* is essential, a large *quantity* of matter seems also to be required for a very great or abiding impression.

In this respect of quantity, to say nothing yet of quality, Shakespeare is among our most considerable. His mere text may be had now in one compact volume; but he is as bulky as Chaucer, or Spenser, or Wordsworth, or Byron. At a fit rate of uninterrupted perusal, he is reading for a good month, even if one should never go back to him. He was a man of great literary industry.

Shakespeare's life was characterised by singular pecuniary prudence and success, and by a

high degree of their usual accompaniment, care for worldly respectability. This statement, though against the grain of certain theories of "genius," is verified indisputably by the entire tenor of the records. So surely is it impressed upon the reader by every memoir of Shakespeare, that it has come to be a summary of his life, with many, to say that he was, *mutatis mutandis*, a Sir Walter Scott of the Elizabethan age, whose sole motive to literature was a desire to earn money. Scott wrote his Novels that he might build Abbotsford, and found, or refound, a family; and Shakespeare wrote his Plays that he might purchase property in Stratford-on-Avon, restore his family there, and live there at last like a gentleman! In the one case, as in the other, this is an unworthy and insufficient view; but it is the travesty of a truth.

In receipt of three distinct kinds of income—his salary as an actor, payments for his dramatic copyright, and his profits as a sharer in two theatres—he is soon a man of means. In 1596 we find him applying, through his father,[1] to

[1] The form of applying through the father if he be alive is still a custom with the Heralds' College. See Sir Sidney Lee's *Life of Shakespeare*, p. 188.—R.M.

the Heralds' College, for the grant of a coat of arms for the family, and taking great pains in the matter too. From about the same date, when he was thirty-two years of age, there begins a series of judicious investments in property not theatrical—and then investments in a definite direction, viz. a contemplated retirement to Stratford. He invests in houses and in land, in freehold and in copyhold, in and about Stratford, and also in an unexpired lease of the small tithes of Stratford and three other parishes. He is heard of twice in the local court of Stratford, prosecuting people for debt —first in 1604 a certain Philip Rogers for £1, 5*s.* 10*d.* for corn and malt; and, next, in 1609, a certain John Addenbroke for £6. In both cases he recovers his money; but in the second, Addenbroke having cut and run after decree against him, he could recover it only by sueing Addenbroke's bail, a certain Thomas Hanly—which he did. By this time apparently he had taken up his residence at Stratford as the owner of "The New Place," one of the best mansions in the town. He lived on with his family at

Stratford, much respected and looked up to, and only now and then visiting London. His little boy, Hamnet, had died at an early age, so that only his two daughters remained. The eldest of these he saw married to Dr. Hall, a physician of high repute settled at Stratford; and the birth in 1608 of a little daughter from this marriage made Shakespeare a grandfather at the age of forty-three. His father had been dead for some time; the mother, and three of Shakespeare's younger brothers, successively died, after having experienced the bettering of the family fortunes. In the last years of Shakespeare's life Stratford was considerably agitated by a project of enclosing some common land in the neighbourhood. Shakespeare secured himself legally against this projected scheme, affecting his landed interests, and was petitioned by the Town Council of Stratford to use his influence to oppose the fulfilment of the project.

"Sept. 1 [1615] Mr. Shakespeare told J. Greene that he was not able to bear the enclosing of Welcombe," is a precious memo-

randum in the hand of the then town clerk of Stratford.[1] In February 1616 Shakespeare's younger daughter married a Thomas Quiney of Stratford—not so good a match as her sister's. In contemplation of this marriage Shakespeare had had a draft of his will drawn up: the draft was converted into a real will in the March following, and within a month after the signing of the will he died. He was buried within the Chancel of Stratford Church, a plain flat stone marking the spot on the pavement, until that carefully prepared monument, with his bust and coat of arms, which pilgrims now go to see on the Church wall near the grave, could be erected, at the pious cost of Dr. and Mrs. Hall. To them had been left the bulk of his property, with strict arrangement for its descent in the male line and by primogeniture, if possible. In the will the widow is but slightly mentioned; but the younger daughter receives a good proportion, and something is done for the comfort of Shakespeare's only surviving sister, a Mrs. Hart. There are a few small friendly legacies, to buy

[1] The accuracy of this wording of the entry is now disputed. —R.M.

rings and the like, to acquaintances in and near Stratford, and three London friends are similarly remembered—Burbage, the great actor of all Shakespeare's high tragic parts, and Heminge and Condell, two other actors, and the first the cashier and book-keeper of Shakespeare's theatres, and the original Falstaff. One omission in the will is rather curious. There is not the least allusion in it to books, papers, or writings published or unpublished. Plate is mentioned, jewels are mentioned, Shakespeare's sword is mentioned, his wearing apparel is mentioned, a particular "broad silver and gilt bowl" is twice mentioned; but whatever books or papers there were in New Place go unnamed into the "household stuff." There is not the least trace in the will of the usual anxiety of a dying author as to the fate of his literary remains.

During the last twenty years of Shakespeare's life at least, we thus see, it was a life of singular pecuniary prudence and prosperity, and of marked care for worldly respectability. With the exception of Edward Alleyn, the founder of Dulwich College, no man connected

with the London stage in that time is known to have made such a fortune as Shakespeare made and to have husbanded it so well. *Acquisitiveness*, to use the term of the etymologists, must have been one of his characteristics —probably remarked on by his contemporaries, and perhaps not always in a friendly spirit by the more curious and less successful of them.

The most general construction upon this whole matter of Shakespeare's money-making may be expressed thus:—Plunged into the reckless Bohemian world of the London stage as it was in the days of Greene and Marlowe—a world of revel and hand-to-mouth—Shakespeare had from the first, from natural fastidiousness of taste, and from reflection on what he saw, taken up, for the regulation of his own conduct, a decided principle of non-Bohemianism. He would *be* among the Bohemians; he could not help it; he would enjoy their humours, mix with them in their merry meetings, and even like some of them much personally and befriend them all he could; but he could not and would not, himself, be permanently one of them. He would have

some kind of firm social position in the world, aloof from taverns and theatres and their orgies—some gradually acquired independency giving him steadiness, consideration, and self-respect even during the unsatisfactory vagabondage of his player's life, and upon which he could at length retire out of that life altogether, to end his days in English ease and family dignity. Hence his wise economy of his earnings as soon as they came to exceed his immediate needs; and hence—natural affection for his native Warwickshire aiding—his investments in Stratford, and his eventual retirement thither, to die the chief man of the place. That he should be snarled at by more than one of the Bohemian tribe for this course of conduct—accused of purse-pride, stinginess, would-be gentlemanhood, forgetfulness of poor fellows as good as himself and whose brains had helped to make him—was but in the natural way of things. Greene's dying burst of spite against him in 1592[1] was one attack

[1] "For there is an upstart crow, beautified in our feathers, that, with his tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide" [evidently a parody of the line in *Henry VI*, Pt. III, Act I, Scene 4, "O tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide!"], "supposes he is as

of the kind, and the anonymous allusion in a curious old tract or chap-book, published probably in 1605 or 1606 (it bears no date) under the title of *Ratseis Ghost*,[1] was probably another.

The wonder is that more such have not been discovered. But the fact is, as we shall see, that Shakespeare's pecuniary prudence and care for respectability were tempered

well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you, and, being an absolute Johannes Factotum, is, in his own conceit, the only *Shake-scene* in the country," &c.—*Greene's Groatsworth of Wit, bought with a Million of Repentance*, 1592.

[1] "'And for you, Sirrah,' says he to the chiefest of them" [strolling players], "'thou hast a good presence upon a stage; methinks thou darkenest thy merit by playing in the country: get thee to London, for, if one man'" [Burbage?] "'were dead, they will have much need of such as thou art. There would be none, in my opinion, better than thyself to play *his* parts; my conceit is such of thee that I durst all the money in my purse on thy head to play *Hamlet* with him for a wager. There thou shalt learn to be frugal (for players were never so thrifty as they are now about London), and to feed upon all men; to let none feed on thee; to make thy hand a stranger to thy pocket, thy heart slow to perform thy tongue's promise; and, when thou feelest thy purse well lined, buy thee some place of lordship in the country, that, grown weary of playing, thy money may there bring thee to dignity and reputation: then thou needest care for no man; no, not for them that before made thee proud with speaking their words on the stage.'"—*Ratseis Ghost, or the Second Part of His Madde Prankes and Robberies.*

with such other qualities of heartiness and good companionship that it was only an exceptional fellow even among the Bohemians that cared to say an evil word of him.

Shakespeare's enormous literary popularity had begun in his own lifetime. His reputation was then fixed and general among his contemporaries in the exact form of opinion about him which all posterity has ratified, to wit, that he was an appearance of the largest magnitude in the whole world's literature, the very King of English Dramatists, and a poet of prodigious natural ease and genius rather than of labour and learning. It is the more necessary to urge this, because it has been said—another instance of our inherent sheepishness in literary matters—that he was not appreciated in his own lifetime. The fame of Shakespeare may have increased as years rolled on; but that the rumour of his greatness had gone abroad throughout the land and pervaded London in particular, while he was yet alive, might be proved by the eulogies of him in books of the time. As early as 1598, when

not half of his plays had been written and few of those written published, we find him mentioned over and over again in a pamphlet surveying English literature generally and enumerating English authors that might be compared with the ancient classics. Will Shakespeare was the favourite of the playgoers from the Sovereign down to the apprentices of Cheapside. Several editions of some of his plays were called for in his lifetime. In books of poetical extracts at that time he is largely represented; in one of the year 1600 he is quoted ninety times. Then there are complimentary allusions to him by brother poets large and small. But it was after 1623, the year of the publication of the First Folio, that there was an adequate speaking out of the diffused feeling about Shakespeare. Two examples of this may be noted. In the edition of 1623 is prefixed a long eulogy of Shakespeare by Ben Jonson, in which the line occurs:

"He was not for an age, but for all time."

And in 1630 a young Cambridge scholar wrote

verses to the memory of Shakespeare, which he permitted to be published: this was John Milton.[1] From these we see such worship of him as has ever since been accorded.

The three statements that have been made concerning Shakespeare are of an obvious character. They may be supplemented by two others of a more intimate nature.

Shakespeare was personally very popular, of reputation for upright character, very genial in society, and with at least an occasional peculiarity in his conversation that attracted attention and amazement. This is a compound assertion, and its items ought perhaps to be brought out separately. As to the reputation for uprightness there can be no doubt. Not only is it vouched for by the prosperous and respected tenor of his life, but there are express vouchers besides. A fellow-dramatist and pamphleteer who had inadvertently been guilty of disrespect to him in the early part of his career apologised publicly within a year on the ground that he did not then know Mr.

[1] Sonnet on Shakespeare.

Shakespeare—whose "civil demeanour" he had since himself seen, and whose "uprightness of dealing" had been reported to him by "divirs of worship." There is no hint to the contrary thereafter. There is respect for Shakespeare as well as affection in the words used by his surviving fellow-players, Heminge and Condell, in their dedication of the First Folio, where they say that their object was not self-profit or fame, but "only to keep the memory of so worthy a friend and fellow alive as was our Shakespeare." They call him "our Shakespeare": well, this one item amounts to much.

Into what an element he had come on his first arrival in London, then a compact city of some 200,000 souls! The theatres of London, six or seven of them already in existence, and more rising, and the tavern life surrounding these theatres, were then the substitutes for our newspaper reading, our novel-reading, our clubs, our public meetings and public dinners, and all our modern appliances for excitement and pastime. Round the theatres there was a little Bohemian world of actors, play-writers, play-

cobblers, usurers who had these poor wretches in their pay, broken-down Oxford and Cambridge men and wits whom no Alma Mater had nursed, London-born Bobadils home from the wars and gawky young men from the country, buffoons, debauchees, and supernumeraries. It was a world of revel and hand-to-mouth and devil-may-care—in the main of blackguardism dashed with genius. That the fair-haired lad from Stratford-on-Avon should have moved through this world without being subdued to its colour, but on the contrary keeping himself straight in it, helping somewhat to mend it (which he really did), till at length, never quite satisfied with it, he extricated himself by the money he had made—this is a biographical item of some importance. But there is this other, that while he was in this element, he accommodated himself to it, and behaved most genially in it. "Sweet," "honey-tongued," "mellifluous," but, above all, "gentle" (which included our "genial" and something more), are the unvarying epithets applied to Shakespeare by his contemporaries. They refer often to his

poetry, but have in view sometimes the man himself. He is also called affectionately "Will," as if, with all his strength and genius, there was nothing externally formidable about him; and he was not in the habit of domineering, like Dr. Johnson, or making a point, in every company where he was, or "tossing and goring several persons." A poor fellow of no intellectual pretensions, if he were only himself agreeable and likeable, could easily, after two or three meetings with Shakespeare, fall into the general way of his friends and call him "Will" across the table.

But there was one limit. Don't you rouse him; don't get into a wit-combat with him! He had a boundless fluency when stirred, a wonderful power of retort, a marvellous faculty for jest. He could dart words like flashes of lightning around the luckless head of his unfortunate foe; he could pour forth phrases that took away the breath, maxims and conclusions from no one knows where, and sighs from the deepest depths.

Ben Jonson quarrels with those that count it among Shakespeare's glories that he "never

blotted a line"; he wishes that "he had blotted a thousand"; and this statement he defends. In the course of his prose eulogy, Ben Jonson says that Shakespeare "was honest and of an open and free nature. . . . He flowed with that facility that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped: '*sufflaminandus erat*,' as Augustus said of Haterius." Evidently here the reference is, through and past the mere writings, to Shakespeare himself.

"*Sufflaminandus erat:* sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped," wrote Ben Jonson, recollecting Shakespeare's conversation. In fact, the *drag* had to be put on. And so in Ben Jonson's recollection, Shakespeare was a talker who, when he got into full motion, would dash himself and all opposition into pieces, unless you could put on the drag. And who but Ben himself was the man to try it? Such at least is the fancy picture of the historian Fuller—and not surely a mere fancy picture either, for Fuller knew Ben Jonson, and lived in the immediate tradition of Shakespeare, and was a most accurate writer, with all his picturesqueness.

"Many were the wit-combats," says Fuller, "betwixt him [Shakespeare] and Ben Jonson, which two I behold like a Spanish great galleon and an English man-of-war. Master Jonson, like the former, was built far higher in learning; solid but slow in performance. Shakespeare, with the English man-of war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds by the quickness of his wit and invention."

Ah! those wit-combats in London clubs and taverns, in which Shakespeare figured! Have we no record of them? None! But we have, from Shakespeare himself, a facsimile or illustration of what some of them may have been. There is a passage in *Hamlet*, of the relevancy of which one can make nothing, unless one takes it to be a wit-combat in which Hamlet beats. The passage is where Laertes leaps into Ophelia's grave, and Hamlet "raves." In this passage Hamlet's speech shows magnificence of expression and metaphor, splendid "mouthing," brilliant braggardism of word and phrase.

It is curious to think what would have

occurred if Milton and Shakespeare had come together in a combat of words. Shakespeare, unconquerable, boundless, beyond calculation in momentary invention of expression, would have been taken aback by Milton's rolling round his head a peal of moral thunder, and would most certainly have lost if the subject had been a moral one; for here Shakespeare would have been the weaker.

There is one other conception of Shakespeare, besides those that have already been spoken of, which stands very plainly and fully revealed even from the external evidences; and it is that *Shakespeare must have been characterised by an unusual non-obtrusiveness, non-opinionativeness on public affairs, or habitual abstinence from particular criticism of his contemporaries, nay, even by an elusiveness in this respect; a shyness of publicity.* From the nature of the case, this is to be proved rather negatively than positively, rather by the absence of record than by citation of record.

Such traces of himself as Shakespeare could not help leaving he did leave. He left mentions of him in parish registers, in letters

patent, in rate-books, in deeds of conveyance, in account-books, in the record of law-courts, &c. Of these *passive* traces of himself, as they may be called, he has left, indeed, rather unusual abundance, all things considered. The tenor of his life, as one bristling with investments and business transactions, secured for us, independently of any wish of his own, these fleeces of him caught here and there on the law fences of his time. But of the kind of traces of a man that depend upon his own will —his marks purposely left on this or that of his time, advertisements of himself or his views, of passing events, placards or even notes of his doings and intentions, registers of his likings or dislikings—of these, in Shakespeare's case, there has been felt to be a deficiency. Whether the deficiency is really so great as has been represented cannot appear till we have added to our survey of the records concerning him the necessary inquisition, for biographical ends, into his own writings. Meanwhile the deficiency, within the bounds of the external survey, must be admitted. In that very deficiency, however, we have a distinct piece

of information. It is our own fault if we do not derive out of that very paucity of personal traces of Shakespeare which we regret a certain valuable contribution to our knowledge of him. If he has left fewer traces of himself than custom would have allowed, we are surely entitled to say that he was the sort of man to leave fewer traces of himself than custom would have allowed. But this is in itself a distinct biographical proposition. It amounts to our statement that one of Shakespeare's traits must have been an unusual non-obtrusiveness, a habit of eluding contemporary notice and public contact with passing topics. A few details will bring out better what is implied in such a statement.

Shakespeare's life, even if we take it only from the time of his coming to London, traverses an age of great stir, of remarkable men and women, and of numerous and important events. The supposed year of his arrival in London was that of Sir Philip Sidney's death. He had been little more than a year in London at the date of the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, at Fotheringay

Castle (February 8, 1587–8). Then what events in the succeeding fifteen years of Elizabeth's reign! The war with Spain at sea and in the Low Countries; the wreck of the Armada; Drake's later voyages and Raleigh's American enterprises; Elizabeth's acts in Church and State at home; the various incidents of her court life, including capricious dealings with her statesmen; Essex's period of favouritism, and his frantic insurrection and death! Then Elizabeth's own death in 1603, and the accession of James! Then the altered policy of England; Raleigh's trial and long imprisonment; the Gunpowder Plot; the truckling to Spain; the growing discontent and increasing strength of the Puritans: the disgusting condition of James's Court, and his successive favouritisms; the seeds of future revolution in Parliamentary struggles; the death, in 1612, of Prince Henry, the hope of the people and of the Puritans, and the transference of the succession to his less-liked brother Charles; the rise of the power of Villiers, afterwards Duke of Buckingham, whose prominent appearance on the scene of public affairs just

preceded Shakespeare's death! Here was a medium of public circumstances calculated to be impressive and suggestive to the most apathetic man, the man of most molluscous temperament, living through it and in the middle of it. What food for observation and reflection, what demand for assent and admiration, what invitation to dissent and disliking, what inducement to written comment and conversational gossip, or at least to mental note-taking! Then, again, the galaxy of eminent Englishmen, interesting intellectually rather than politically, or some of them both intellectually and politically, alive and active between 1586 and 1616! In addition to the statesmen and men of action—Cecil, Lord Chancellor Ellesmere, Drake, the first and second Earls of Dorset, Raleigh, Essex, the Earl of Southampton, the Earl of Pembroke, &c., &c., with whom for the nonce may go Lord Bacon, not known within this period as more than Sir Francis Bacon—in addition to these may be taken, as a selected sample from the expressly literary list, Spenser, Camden, Peele, Greene, Lylye, Lodge, Kyd, Chapman, Marlowe,

Daniel, Drayton, Sylvester, Nash, Webster, Sir John Davies, Dr. Donne, Bishop Hall, Ben Jonson, Marston, Beaumont and Fletcher, and, for a dip of bathos, Taylor the Water-Poet. All those persons, and many more of public mark, were living in Shakespeare's day round about him, all of them being, at one time or another, Londoners like himself. Now, in a city the size of London then, just as in Edinburgh or any like-sized city now, the inhabitants must have been so jostled together that every man of any public note must have been known to every other man of any public note, at least by sight in the streets. But Shakespeare's relations with many of those mentioned must have been more than this. As an actor or dramatist, he was in the very centre of the whirl of free-and-easy London society and gossip. His must have been one of the best-known faces in London; not a theatre-going apprentice in Cheapside or Fleet Street but must have been able to nudge his companion in the street, as Shakespeare chanced to pass, and say, "That's Shakespeare of the Blackfriars." Actors being the most popular

of men, people even abbreviated his name affectionately, as they did those of other theatrical favourites, and called him "Will Shakespeare." And he, on his side, as we positively know, was familiar enough with some of these who were so familiar with him. Not to make too much of the well-attested fact that both Elizabeth and James had a peculiar liking for him and his plays, proofs might be produced of Shakespeare's acquaintanceship, or more than mere acquaintanceship, with several of the great public and political men of the Courts of both these sovereigns—notably the Earls of Southampton, Pembroke, and Montgomery—and of his friendships among his literary coevals. It is not known that he was personally acquainted with Bacon; but there is good evidence that Spenser and he came to know each other during Spenser's occasional visits to London from Ireland, between 1590, when the first three books of the *Faery Queene* were published, and his death in 1599. The intimacy of Shakespeare with some of the others in the literary list, especially with his brother dramatists, and with Ben Jonson in

chief among these from 1598 onwards, is not only an inevitable assumption, but also an attested fact.

But let us draw the circle of Shakespeare's social surroundings close, and think of the many persons, neither of political nor of high literary celebrity, with whom he was necessarily in contact. At Stratford there was his own family, and, besides these, his friends and acquaintances,—the Combes, the Quineys, the Nashes, Greene the lawyer, Sturley, Hamnet Sadler, Alderman Walker, &c., &c. In Warwickshire round about there were other friends and acquaintances. Then, in London, there were, as close round him as could be, his theatrical co-partners of the Globe and Blackfriars, and his fellow-actors at these theatres. We know the names of at least twenty-five or thirty of these fellow-actors, some of whom pre-deceased Shakespeare, while most of them survived him, and whose lives, intertwined with each other, were all intertwined more or less with his. We know something about each. We know where some of them lived, and whether they acted tragedy or low comedy,

were singers or buffoons, and which characters in Shakespeare's plays some of them personated.

Well, what is the amount of the known and preserved response of Shakespeare personally to the multitudinous particular impressions of men, things, and events that must have been thus showered upon him? His *response*, we say; for we know that a good deal of observation was fixed on *him* in the world in which he moved. We mean also his *personal* response, his direct and undisguised response in his own name, and not his more occult response through his Plays and Poems. That his Plays and Poems *are* a response, an artistic concert of responses, to his experiences and observations of the world in which he moved, is indubitable. All writings, and especially the writings of poets, and most especially the writings of dramatists and humorists, necessarily contain shreds and *memoranda* of the social surroundings of their authors and of their reflections thereon. What shreds and *memoranda* of this kind there are in Shakespeare's Plays and Poems, what allusions to contemporary men and events lurk in them,

what real oddities and humours of his time they conserve, what flakes of his own experience and thoughts on actual men and things are distributed through them—this is a matter for further inquiry. But to the present inquiry—What amount of direct and undisguised recognitions of contemporary persons and events have we either from the hand of Shakespeare himself, writing avowedly as an Englishman of the reigns of Elizabeth and James, or from credible recollections of his behaviour and conversation?—to that inquiry the answer must be that we have very little. So far as we have evidence from his own hand, or from credibly transmitted accounts, we have to imagine him as wonderfully elusive of every contingency of his time that might have been expected to extract from him a comment or an opinion. We have to think of him in the main, in this respect, as not unlike his own Duke in *Measure for Measure*—"a fantastical Duke of dark corners," always present and vigilant somehow, and knowing all that is going on, but masked and cowled, keeping the results of his observations to himself, and never

turning up precisely when and where he might have been expected. He is rumoured to be away on a journey, and yet he has never left the spot.

In the first place, we have no private letters of Shakespeare to his family or any of his familiar acquaintances, no shred of any diary or commonplace book of his, and indeed hardly a scrap of his handwriting. Only five undoubted signatures of his are extant—two on the deeds connected with his purchase of the property in Blackfriars in 1613, and three on the several sheets of his will. In the British Museum, it is true, there is a copy of Florio's translation of Montaigne (1603) with the name "Will^m^ Shakspere" on the title-page; and it would be pleasant to think that in this we have at least one of the books that had been in Shakespeare's possession. But the authenticity of the signature is questioned. The largest scrap of Shakespeare's undoubted handwriting in existence is the "By me William Shakspeare" at the end of his will. And in the will itself we have also almost the sole recognition left by himself of his private

friendships, or the persons in whom he took an interest. Mr. Thomas Combe, to whom he left his sword; Thomas Russell, Esq.; Francis Collins of Warwick, whom he requested to be overseer of his will, and to whom he left small money-remembrances; Hamnet Sadler; William Reynolds; Anthony Nash; Mr. John Nash; and the little boy, William Walker, to all of whom he left small gifts—these eight persons in Stratford or its neighbourhood, and his three London associates, Burbage, Heminge, and Condell, form the little group of eleven, on whom, beyond Shakespeare's own family, we are sure that his thoughts rested with some fondness as he was leaving the world. But the fondness must be inferred from the fact, for, strangely enough, whether because the scrivener who drew the will was a man of nouns and not of adjectives, there is not a single sentimental phrase in the will. It is "my wife," and not "my dear wife," or "my loving wife," as was usual in wills; "my daughter Susanna"—"my daughter Judith"; "my fellows," Heminge, Burbage, and Condell. Heminge's

name comes before Burbage's in the will, as if Shakespeare held the elderly cashier and account-keeper of the Blackfriars and Globe, who used to personate his Falstaff, in somewhat nearer regard than even the splendid actor of his tragic parts. In the absence of private letters or other papers from Shakespeare himself that might have given us his impressions of those most about him, and informed us of his cares, likings, chagrins, companionships, and the routine of his life, readings, and thinkings, we are glad to make the most of dim glimpses through his will. We add something by going back upon the series of business documents already quoted. Out of these we have a vision of a number of persons besides who must have interested Shakespeare pleasantly or otherwise; and again Heminge comes out as a man in whom Shakespeare had trust.

But what is all this, compared with the information we have about many persons of Shakespeare's time, immeasurably less important than he, from their transmitted private letters, diaries and commonplace books?

Hardly, however, on this mere fact that we have no preserved private letters or the like, written by Shakespeare, could we found the idea of that elusiveness which we have attributed to him. He *must* have written many letters. He can hardly, as a dramatist and poet, or even as a man of business, but have had memoranda and manuscripts about him, over and above all of his that ever came to press. That these things have all perished may well be merely accidental. If those original manuscripts of some of the Plays which were certainly in the possession of Heminge and Condell when they edited the First Folio, in 1623, have all disappeared, the same untoward fate may easily in the course of years have befallen books or papers that were left in New Place, and scattered letters of Shakespeare that were in private hands. It is not beyond possibility that some such things should yet some day emerge. At all events, though we may remark it as strange that no specimens of Shakespeare's handwriting have come down to us, except five signatures, while we have so many auto-

graphs of less considerable men of his age, we cannot safely draw any deduction from the fact as to Shakespeare's habits and disposition. We are not entitled to say that he did not write letters—that he was a bad correspondent. We are not entitled to say even that he was less of a book-fancier than men who themselves write books usually are, nor that he did not freely scribble his name or casual notes in such books as he had. There is perhaps a shade of ground for this last notion. Printed books with the former owners' names in them do get taken care of after a while when their former owners have come to be famous. Books that belonged to Ben Jonson and with his autograph in them are not very rare; and, besides the original MSS. in Milton's own hand of a good many of his earlier poems, there are extant volumes that belonged to him, and copies of his own pamphlets, with his autograph and other jottings on their pages. One rather fancies that, if Shakespeare had any tolerable library, and was in the habit of writing his name in books, if only when presenting one of them to a friend, ocular evidence

to that effect would still exist. But to reason so may be to reason too curiously.

But a very different thing from mere private letter-writing, or scribbling one's name in books, or keeping diaries and commonplace books for one's own use, is the writing of complimentary epistles, dedications, epigrams, scraps of satire, &c., meant for publication or at least for social circulation. It is here that a peculiarity of Shakespeare among his contemporaries does present itself. We should not have expected him certainly to be publishing his opinions on the affairs of Church and State. It was not so common, nor so safe, to talk politics or to write politics in the reigns of Elizabeth and James as it is now. There was, of course, plenty of gossip even about politics and political personages among the Londoners; and some of it, to judge from preserved specimens, must have been very rough and scurrilous. But the liberty of open speech or writing about questions of Government had its limits for men in Shakespeare's position—limits so distinctly understood that it would have argued exceptional political zeal,

exceptional hot-headedness and recklessness, to transgress them. But within the allowed limits in such matters, and much more in that larger field of matters where there was no restraint, but every man might comment and criticise as much as he chose, how did Shakespeare act? With a reticence, a non-concern, a non-participation, perfectly astonishing. When the antiquary, Captain Grose, was peregrinating Scotland, Burns gave his countrymen the well-known warning:

> "Hear, land o' Cakes, and brither Scots
> Frae Maidenkirk to Johnny Groat's:
> If there's a hole in a' your coats,
> I rede you, tent it:
> A chiel's amang you taking notes,
> And, faith, he'll prent it."

The very reverse of such a "chiel" was Shakespeare. His note-taking may have been shrewd and vigilant enough; but it was all mental, or to be worked in some half-disguised manner into his dramas, and not for pointed or immediate "printing." In this respect he was almost singular among his contemporaries. What do we find them, one and all, doing—Spenser, Chapman, Drayton, Daniel, Nash,

Donne, Ben Jonson, Marston, Dekker, Chettle, and other known poets and dramatists of rank, besides the small fry of professed epigrammatists, like Owen and John Davies of Hereford? Writing verses to or about each other, commendatory poems on each other's works, mutual invectives and lampoons, in prologues to their plays or otherwise, epistles and dedications of compliment to eminent noblemen and courtiers, epitaphs on noblemen or ladies just dead, and comments in a thousand forms on incidents of the day. In the very midst of all this crossfire of epistles, epigrams, and poems of occasion, stood Shakespeare; coming in, too, for his own share of notice in them—for just a little of the invective and for a very great deal of the eulogy. But he could not be brought to return a shot. Unlike Spenser, who seems to have had a particular pleasure in thinking of his friends, and hailing them affectionately across the Irish Channel by direct messages and mentions in his poems, Shakespeare had no habit of distributing complimentary poems through the general circle of his acquaintances. Unlike big Ben Jonson, on the other hand,

who was the most aggressive and pugnacious of critics and the most domineering of talkers, always at war with somebody, and abusing ten of his literary brethren at a time for one he praised, Shakespeare let what he disliked around him pass equally with what he liked. Even when attacked, he did not retaliate.

The contrast between Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, so instructive in many ways, is especially instructive in the present point of view. Take up the one massive volume of Ben Jonson's collected works. Not only are some of the dramas and masques there contained avowedly founded on social interests of the day, and some of them direct blasts of invective and literary controversy on Ben's own account; not only are there dedications to most of the plays, and prologues or inductions, full of personal allusions and criticisms; but in the appended Miscellanies in verse and prose there is a perfect mine of particulars as to the author's relations with his contemporaries and his opinions of them. They are a treasury, mostly metrical, of personalities and social gossip.

Contrast this with what we know of Shakespeare. Nothing on earth, it appears, could get a poem of the mere occasional kind out of *him*,—no birth, no marriage, no death, no publication of a brother-poet's book, no news of a victory, no movement or city-visit of Royalty, no arrival in England of an illustrious stranger, no oddity or tragedy of incident that was the theme of all tongues and setting the taverns in uproar. It is as if he had sworn an oath never to take up his pen except for his dramas or in moments of lyric impulse and pure poetic phantasy. Among his miscellaneous poems (with a certain important exception hereafter to be studied) there cannot be pointed out any at all resembling Ben Jonson's numerous poems of personal allusion.

But may he not have written such things and may they not have been lost? This is an incredible supposition. Mere private letters and papers do run a risk of perishing; but commendatory verses, elegies, epigrams, and the like, sent into circulation by a writer of eminence, even if not printed by himself, secure their own transmission. The persons praised,

or the friends of the persons vilified, are interested in their preservation, the multiplication of copies, and their eventual publication. Whatever commendatory poem Shakespeare had given to any literary friend, with liberty to publish it, would certainly have been published there and then; and booksellers, as we know, were on the watch to pick up and publish anything of Shakespeare's, even without his leave. Things written about Shakespeare by very insignificant versifiers of his time have duly come down to us; how is it that return-verses from him to them, and to others of higher worth, have not come down? The only answer must be that it is because no such things, or hardly any such things, ever existed. In the very heart of all the bustle and gossip of London we see Shakespeare sitting by himself, not only silent, non-obtrusive, non-opinionative, but absolutely proof against the wiliest lure or the fiercest explosion of contemporary incident that would draw an utterance from his pen. "*Aiunt: Quid aiunt? Aiant,*" we hear him saying to himself, looking on and listening, but taking no active part.

We said that this trait of Shakespeare would, from its very nature, be proved rather negatively than positively, rather by the conspicuous absence of what would have proved the contrary than by direct attestation of the trait itself. But there *is* at least one curious attestation. If there was any public event in the whole of Shakespeare's life that might have been expected to break him down in his rule of reticence, it was surely the death of Queen Elizabeth. That was a trap, we may say, expressly set for him, expressly calculated to snap a shred of elegy from his Silent Majesty. Well, even this trap he avoided. While all the other poets of the day were moved to metrical expressions or metrical pretences of feeling on the occasion, not a line came from him. The singularity was even noted and complained of. The dramatist Chettle, in *his* contribution of poetic grief on the occasion,[1] has this reference to Shakespeare's unaccountable behaviour:

"Nor doth the silver-tonguèd Melecest
Drop from his honeyed muse one sable tear,

[1] *England's Mourning Garment*, 1603.

To mourn her death that gracèd his desert,
And to his lays opened her royal ear.
Shepherd, remember our Elizabeth
And sing *her* rape, done by that Tarquin, Death!"

As the previous statement, about Shakespeare's pecuniary prudence and care for respectability, seemed capable of a certain generalised expression, so with the present statement. It may be generalised thus:

Shakespeare seems either instinctively or consciously and deliberately to have dissented from a theory or school of Poetry, or indeed of Literature generally, that has always had a following, and that was represented in his time by Ben Jonson. It may be called the theory or school of Newspaper and Pamphlet Poetry, or the Literature of Occurrences. What do we see in our own day? Burst after burst of poems on the successive events by which the public mind is roused, and which are chronicled in the newspapers. A great public hero dies—*presto!* from Land's End to Caithness, a commotion among the versifiers, a rustling of pens, and a publication of hundreds of odes, elegies, and meditations on the subject. Again, a victory to our arms, and a great General returns

home—straightway a thousand caps are in the air, a million hearts are ecstatic; and there is added, within a week, to the Literature of England, a specific new deposit, consisting of poems and articles on that General and his actions. Now much of all Literature and Poetry must always be such Poetry or Literature of Occurrence. From the very nature of the case, most of it will be worthless and ephemeral. For what can be expected to be the quality of feeling that has been pumped up to order, of moonlight meditation round a prescribed external lamp-post? Literature which is the result of thinking what to say will necessarily be poorer stuff than Literature which consists in the saying of what is already thought. And yet out of this Occurrence Literature, as we all know, there do come, every now and then, noble additions to our permanent and classic literature—poems and other things that are not ephemeral, but of endless interest and worth. When it is a Milton, a Wordsworth, a Burns, or a Tennyson that expresses himself on some public occurrence, *his* ode, or sonnet, or satire, or elegy, stands out from among the rest by

its deeper truth and higher validity at the moment, and it descends in the national memory after the rest have vanished. And why? Why, but because then it was not meditation on a sudden order round a prescribed external point, but either the rushing forth at once of love, or reverence, or scorn, that had already been long in the mind, or at least the weaving forth in more leisurely texture of feelings and fancies kept in reserve. By way of example of the first, think of Milton's political sonnets. Most of all, however, when the occurrence is one of profound and intimate private concern, it will be the true lyric, the elegy for all time, that it will occasion. When the death that is sorrowed for is the death of one long known, loved and admired, then it will be a *Lycidas* or an *Epitaphium Damonis* that we have from Milton, a *Highland Mary* or a *Lament for James, Earl of Glencairn*, that we have from Burns, an *Adonais* from Shelley. Remembering all this, we must see that Occurrence Literature cannot be proscribed, but must always be a form of literature within which, and according to the laws of which, much that is finest and

surest to be permanent in literature generally may be expected to be generated. But from Occurrence Literature of any kind Shakespeare seems to have systematically shrunk. Not incidents externally given in an actual present, but imaginary histories transacting themselves before his inner eye, and the feelings proper to moments in these imaginary histories and appertaining to the visionary beings moving in them—these always (with one great exception of his Sonnets) were the occurrences that occupied Shakespeare's muse. Not on a comparatively narrow Atlantic, held between two continents and gutted into by their capes and projections, so that one could hardly ever be out of sight of land, but on a vaster Pacific, of more exhaustless horizons, some of them hazier, or more dreamily violet and golden, would *his* Poesy embark.

There is a passage in one of his plays in which, speaking vicariously through the mouth of an imaginary poet, he makes that poet disown Occurrence Poetry altogether and avow for himself a theory of poetry quite opposed to it. The passage occurs in Scene 1, Act I of

Timon of Athens, and is part of the conversation between a Poet and a Painter, introduced among the persons who are waiting at Timon's levée, to pay their respects to his munificence. It is so striking, and puts into so apt a form much of what we have been trying to say throughout the present statement about Shakespeare, that it may be quoted here. The Poet and the Painter, be it understood, are talking together in the crowd in the hall of the levée before Timon appears. The Poet has brought a new book of his which he is to present to the great man, and the Painter has brought a picture. The Poet looks at the Painter's picture and praises it to the Painter's complete satisfaction. Then, the Painter having kindly inquired when the Poet's book is coming out, the Poet, holding the book in his hand, and unable of course to give the Painter any such immediate idea of it as he had obtained of the Painter's picture, proceeds to describe it briefly. Tapping the book, he says to the Painter:

> "I have, in this rough work, shaped out a man
> Whom this beneath world doth embrace and hug

With amplest entertainment: my free drift
Halts not particularly, but moves itself
In a wide sea of wax: no levelled malice
Infects one comma in the course I hold;
But flies an eagle flight, bold and forth on,
Leaving no tract behind."

Whether this was written with any self-reference or not, we take the liberty of borrowing it as expressing most memorably what we have been asserting about Shakespeare on quite independent evidence. *His* free drift did not "halt particularly"—did not stop at this or that particular actual occurrence. *His* pen, his writing-stylus, did not make minute tracings here and there in the prepared tablet, but moved itself over the whole, as in a wide sea of wax. No "levelled malice," *i.e.* no malice levelled or aimed at individuals, and, for that matter, little levelled eulogy either, infected any comma in the course of *his* writing. *His* Poesy—the "sea of wax," it is evident, had become an ocean by this time in Shakespeare's rapidly changing fancy, and there was either a ship bounding through the ocean with eagle-swiftness, or a literal eagle

cleaving the air over it—*his* Poesy, if ever any Poesy, did fly an eagle flight,

> "Bold and forth on,
> Leaving no tract behind."

Are we quite sure of this? Are there no exceptions? Well, there is a fragment of a lampoon on Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlcote, the great man of the neighbourhood of Stratford, which lampoon has come down by tradition as Shakespeare's, with the story of his deer-stealing, and which some think may possibly have been his, and the first preserved scrap of his poetry. There is a bit of comical doggerel on a Stratford usurer, similarly ascribed to him, but with even less likelihood. In one of his stray sonnets—the authorship of which has however been questioned—there is a respectful mention of Spenser. Of real interest are the dedications of his two early poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, to the young Earl of Southampton, which however increase the wonder that we have no more of such things from Shakespeare's hand. He *could* dedicate, like other people, and yet, after these

two interesting epistles to one young nobleman, he stopped the practice, and dedicated no more to him nor to anyone else. Finally, among his miscellaneous poems there is the mysterious collection of his *Sonnets*, especially so called. This last is an exception indeed. But it is an exception the close study of which confirms the general statement. It is as if there after all did require to be some secret safety-valve for this heart of mighty habitual self-repression, and as if through this one valve there was an effusion preternaturally intense because of the singleness of the outlet. It is as if in these Sonnets, occasionally written during a period of three or four years as entries in a kind of metrical diary, confidential between himself and at most one or two intimate friends, Shakespeare did lock up so much of his own deepest moods and musings, so much of the keenest self-confession, that the entire practice of ordinary and open circulation of his opinions and flying impressions was in his case unnecessary and distasteful. And certainly it *was* a locking-up. How the Sonnets came to be published no one knows;

but in the state in which they *were* published they have come down to us like a barred antique jewel-chest which no key has been found to fit, and so long left aside that it has been covered with cobweb.

CHAPTER III

CHRONOLOGY OF THE PLAYS

In the previous pages some attempt has been made to show the external sources of information respecting Shakespeare, or what we know of him through the recorded particulars of his life. Let us now try to find out the man in his writings.

This is a vast subject, involving the whole body of Shakespeare study and criticism; and little more can be done here than indicate the mode or modes in which further inquiry might be prosecuted.

First of all, what *are* Shakespeare's writings, and what is their true chronological order? This in itself is a very difficult question, in which a great deal of labour and ingenuity has been expended by English critics and by German, with considerable diversity of opinions and conclusions.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE PLAYS

The order of the *publication* of those writings of Shakespeare which are now acknowledged as his, though not in all cases as wholly his, is not so difficult to settle. So far as is known, it was as follows:

Venus and Adonis, 1593 (Shakespeare *ætat.* 29, and perhaps seven years in London). Five subsequent editions were published in Shakespeare's lifetime: 1594, 1596, 1600, 1602, 1602.

Lucrece, 1594 (*ætat.* 30). Four subsequent editions were published before his death: 1598, 1600, 1607, 1616.

Romeo and Juliet, 1597 (*ætat.* 33). Three subsequent editions in his life: 1599, and two in 1609.

Richard II, 1597 (*ætat.* 33). Three subsequent editions in his life: 1598, 1608, 1615.

Richard III, 1597 (*ætat.* 33). Four subsequent editions in his life: 1598, 1602, 1605, 1612.

Henry IV, Part First, 1598 (*ætat.* 34). Four subsequent editions in his life: 1599, 1604, 1608, 1615.

Love's Labour's Lost, 1598 (*ætat.* 34). No other edition in his life.

Passionate Pilgrim, 1599 (*ætat.* 35). Another edition in 1612.

Henry V, 1600 (*ætat.* 36). Two subsequent editions in his life: 1602, and 1608: but all three imperfect and surreptitious.

Much Ado about Nothing, 1600 (*ætat.* 36). No other edition in his life.

Midsummer Night's Dream, 1600 (*ætat.* 36). Another edition in the same year.

Merchant of Venice, 1600 (*ætat.* 36). Another edition in the same year.

Titus Andronicus (1593?) 1600 (*ætat.* 36). A second edition in 1611.

Henry IV, Part Second, 1600 (*ætat.* 36). No other edition in his life.

The Phœnix and the Turtle, a short lyrical piece, 1601 (*ætat.* 37). In Chester's *Love's Martyr.*

Hamlet, 1603 (surreptitious) (*ætat.* 39). Three subsequent editions in his life: 1604, 1605, 1611.

King Lear, 1608 (*ætat.* 44). Another edition in the same year.

Troilus and Cressida, 1609 (*ætat.* 45). Another edition in the same year.

Pericles, 1609 (*ætat.* 45). Another edition in the same year, and a third in 1611.

Sonnets, 1609 (*ætat.* 45). Unauthorised.

Lover's Complaint, 1609 (*ætat.* 45). At end of edition of *Sonnets.*

Here we have, as published in Shakespeare's lifetime, either by himself, or by his permission to booksellers, or surreptitiously, all that we now call his Minor Poems, and fifteen of his Plays. If we add that an extremely imperfect copy of his *Merry Wives of Windsor* had been published in 1602 (*ætat.* 36), and also that several of the so-called "Doubtful Plays," not now included among Shakespeare's, but in which some think Shakespeare may have had

a hand, had been published between 1592 and 1609, we have a measure of the extent to which Shakespeare can have been known to the *reading public* in his lifetime. His minor Poems, two of which, his *Venus and Adonis* and his *Lucrece*, had been popular enough to pass through six and five editions respectively, and about fifteen of his Plays, the most popular of which had proved to be *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*, and the historical plays *Richard II*, the First Part of *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, and *Richard III*: that was all.

Twenty-two of his now acknowledged plays, including not a few of his greatest, had not been published, and remained to be published after his death: viz. *The Tempest*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Merry Wives* (with above proviso), *Measure for Measure*, *Comedy of Errors*, *As you Like it*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *All's Well that ends Well*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Winter's Tale*, *King John*, the three parts of *Henry VI*, *Henry VIII*, *Coriolanus*, *Timon of Athens*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Cymbeline*. All these were first published in the Folio of 1623,

seven years after Shakespeare's death, with the exception of *Othello*, a separate edition of which had appeared in 1622. *Pericles* was omitted from the First Folio: it was added in the Third Folio of 1664.

But, though this is the order of the *publication* of the writings, we are still at sea as to the order of their *composition*. To determine that order, their true chronology, various means have to be used. It may be determined by:

1. External or Positive Evidence.—This includes, first, the dates of publication, as just given, so far as they fall within Shakespeare's lifetime. The date of first publication so far helps, as it settles for at least fifteen of the Plays and for all the Poems the latest limit, *i.e.* the year when each was certainly in existence. Then further there are some scattered references to some of the Plays, and to performances of some of them, in contemporary books and records, helping further to fix dates. The most important of these by far is a passage in Francis Meres's *Wit's Treasury* in 1598, enumerating twelve of the Plays by their titles as then already

produced—seven of which twelve we should not have otherwise known to have been then in existence, inasmuch as they were not yet published, and four of them were not published till 1623. Malone's *Chronology*, published about 1778, was compiled mainly from the external evidence.

Again, there is the method of determining the date of composition which consists in examination of:

2. Internal Tests.—This includes allusions in the Plays to facts and events. These might, of course, help; but there is not much help of this kind, and so the main Internal Tests are:

The Thought and Style, as proving the author's comparative maturity and immaturity.

In competent hands this might be a great test, especially if intellectual fulness or involution of thought were the thing mainly taken into account. The disappearance of early tricks or mannerisms of style might also be worth something. On the whole, however, this test is apt to be fallacious; and one would not always trust another's

instinct in such matters in preference to one's own.

Peculiarities of Verse-Mechanism.— Much reliance has been placed on these by Mr. Furnivall, Mr. Fleay, and others, and especially on the four special tests which they call the *Rhyme Test*, the *Supernumerary Final Syllable or Feminine Ending Test*, the *Weak-Ending Test*, and the *Stopped Line Test.* It is thought Shakespeare gradually used less and less of rhyme in his metrical dialogue; and hence that more of rhyme in such dialogue points generally to priority of time in the composition. That is the *Rhyme Test.* It is thought also that Shakespeare gradually allowed himself greater liberty of the supernumerary final syllable, or the 5 *xa* + formula, in his blank verse, and hence that plays where such lines abound may be premised to be later than others where they are rarer. It is thought also that, as he went on, he concluded his lines more frequently (even lines of 5 *xa*) in a weak or unaccented syllable. Finally, *stopped lines*, or lines where the logical pause comes at the end of the line, are

supposed to be more frequent in the earlier plays, while later ones have a free play of the cæsura through the lines. But there are objections to any trust being placed in these tests, and to some extent they conflict with each other, and with the External Evidences.

REVISED CHRONOLOGY OF THE PLAYS AND POEMS

FIRST SERIES OR CYCLE: THOSE PRODUCED IN ELIZABETH'S REIGN, OR IN THE SEVENTEEN YEARS BETWEEN 1586 AND 1603: SHAKESPEARE *ætat.* 22–39.

Titus Andronicus.—Mentioned by Meres in 1598, published in 1600: in all probability it is not Shakespeare's out and out, but a specimen of his early hackwork for the theatres in adapting an old stock piece —it may have been done about 1588. The story, a horrible one of the later times of the Roman Empire, seems to have been a popular one, already drama-

tised. The critics find *Titus Andronicus* to be clearly after Marlowe's manner.

Pericles.—Not published till 1609, and not heard of in Meres's list of 1598, nor anywhere else before 1609: omitted altogether from the First Folio of 1623. From this last fact, and from other circumstances, it has been argued that the Play is not Shakespeare's at all, but the production of someone else (possibly a George Wilkins) about 1608, though attributed to Shakespeare when it was published in 1609. The preponderance of evidence, however, is in favour of Shakespeare's authorship, to the extent at least that he recast and retouched some old stock piece on the subject. In that case, however, I cannot assign it to so late a date in Shakespeare's career as 1608, but agree with those who regard the recast as one of his earliest performances. In fact, it may go with *Titus Andronicus*, as done about 1588. As there, the subject is from the old Roman

or Græco-Roman world: it is indeed the story of "Apollonius of Tyre," popular throughout the Middle Ages, and versified by Gower in his *Confessio Amantis*. While in *Titus Andronicus*, however, Shakespeare, if he was the author, had imitated Marlowe, in *Pericles* he takes rather, it is thought, to the manner of Greene, so that there is a contrast between the two plays in style and feeling.

First Part of Henry VI.—Not published till 1623: not mentioned by Meres in 1598. There are great doubts as to this being Shakespeare's; and general assent that, if he had any share in it, the Shakespearian in it was confined to touching up an older stock piece and contributing lines and passages. This is probably a correct view; and, if so, the Play so far may be a specimen of Shakespeare, about 1589 or 1590, first trying his hand in a Chronicle Play from English History. The subject, referring us to about the year 1430 and the story of Joan of Arc and the English-

French war of that date, was then turned to stage use.

Comedy of Errors.—Mentioned by Meres in 1598: not published till 1623. I am decidedly inclined to put this as a very early play of Shakespeare's, perhaps his first comedy, written about 1589. It is a comedy of the farcical kind, and may have been a recast or adaptation of an earlier stage piece. The subject—that of ludicrous blundering caused by the likeness of two twin brothers—had been a tradition from Plautus, and, through him, from the earlier Greek stage. The scenes of the play are imagined in the Greek or Græco-Asiatic world.

The Taming of the Shrew.—First published in 1623: not mentioned by Meres in 1598. From this last fact, and from the merits of the play, there has been a controversy as to how far it is Shakespeare's, and whether it may not be only an adaptation by him of a previous stock piece. It is

farcical in kind, like the *Comedy of Errors;* and I am inclined to regard it as also an early specimen of Shakespeare in that kind, say about 1589 or 1590. One peculiarity of the play is that it contains a play within a play—*i.e.* consists of an introduction or framework, in which we see a drunk tinker picked up in the road, taken to a lord's mansion, and made to believe he is a lord, and then of a play acted in the mansion before this drunk tinker. The notion of the temporary metamorphosis of a poor wretch into a King or great man is very old in Romance, and is found in the *Arabian Nights;* but it is notable that here Shakespeare makes the induction or setting take place in English ground of his own time. Sly is a drunken tinker picked up outside a public-house at a roadside in Warwickshire, and carried to an English nobleman's mansion. The play itself, however, the real *Taming of the Shrew*, or story of Petruchio and Katharina, is placed in Italy.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona.—Mentioned by Meres in 1598, but not published till 1623. Though some would date this play as late as about 1594 or 1595, and regard it as only partly Shakespeare's, I am inclined to place it as early as about 1590, and to regard it as one of Shakespeare's first original efforts in Romantic Love-Comedy. The ground again is Italian, and the story was built out of hints from translated Italian and Spanish novels.

Second and Third Parts of King Henry VI.—First printed in their present form in 1623: not mentioned by Meres in 1598. The controversy as to Shakespeare's authorship, and the mode of it, is more complex about these two Parts than about the First Part. They are decidedly superior in power to the First Part, so that, if the trio is Shakespeare's, an interval may be supposed between Part I and Parts II and III. Hence, Part I having been dated about 1589, Parts II and III may be dated about 1591 or 1592. They are

largely founded on two plays which are known to have then been in possession of one of the London theatres (not Shakespeare's), and which were published in 1594 and 1595 respectively—one entitled *First Part of the Contention of the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster*, and the other *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York and the Death of Good King Henry VI;* and a much-debated question is whether these were Shakespeare's first sketches of what are now Parts II and III of the historic Trilogy of *Henry VI*, or whether he only helped himself to them as so much raw material for those Parts, after having fabricated Part I out of other material. Anyhow there is a great deal of Shakespeare's hand in Parts II and III; and the conclusion may be that in the three Parts together, with whatever use of other people's previous material, he made his first great venture on the ground of English History, by dramatising that long reign of the fifteenth century which

merged into the Wars of the Roses and in which Jack Cade's Insurrection was an episode. Who but Shakespeare could have done the humours of the Cade Insurrection and the death of Cade in the Second Part?

The eight pieces named bring us through what may be called the years of Shakespeare's apprenticeship and hackwork, when he was trying his hand and proving his genius on anything that presented itself, not disdaining the business of mere adaptation when necessary. About 1592 or 1593, when he was twenty-eight years of age, we may consider this time of hackwork and apprenticeship over. He then extricates himself, and starts, with more conscious and acknowledged power, as the free Shakespeare. Let us follow him from this point.

Venus and Adonis (published 1593) and *Lucrece* (published 1594).—These two non-dramatic pieces, both dedicated to the young Earl of Southampton, were the first things of Shakespeare's that appeared

in print, and they are the only pieces of his writing, from first to last, of the publication of which by himself we are positively sure. It was rather the interest of theatre-proprietors to prevent the publication of the pieces with which they entertained theatre-goers, to keep the manuscripts in their chests, as valuable private stock; and hence, though as many as fifteen or sixteen of Shakespeare's plays did at various times in his life get into print through booksellers, this was often by surreptitious means, and we do not know that in any case he himself gave authority, or superintended the publication, though it is likely enough that he sometimes did.

It is certain, at all events, that none of the eight plays hitherto enumerated had been printed when *Venus and Adonis* appeared. Shakespeare himself, in his dedication of that poem, calls it "the first heir of my invention." That may mean that the poem was a juvenile one which he had kept by him for some years and

now published; and so the *Lucrece*, published the following year, may also have been written long before. It seems more likely to me, however, that both pieces were written about the time of their publication, and so that, in calling *Venus and Adonis* "the first heir of my invention," Shakespeare meant simply "my first publication," ignoring the dramatic pieces that had preceded it, and were mere undivulged theatre property. In any case, the publication of two non-dramatic pieces marks the point at which Shakespeare stepped forth first as an avowed author; and therefore I place them at the head of this portion of the list, though it is possible that one or two of the plays next to be mentioned may have slightly preceded both, or at all events have preceded *Lucrece*.

Richard III.—First published, and surreptitiously, in 1597, but probably written about 1593. Shakespeare here continues his history of the Wars of the Roses from his *Henry VI*, and brings down English

History to Crookback's death and the accession of Henry VII in 1485. He worked chiefly on Holinshed's *Chronicles* and Hall's, who had been influenced by the *History of Edward V and Richard III* attributed to Sir Thomas More.

King John.—Not published till 1623, but mentioned by Meres in 1598. Having broken excellent ground in English History, and felt the historical fascination, Shakespeare continues his dramatic practice in the history form. He now goes back, however, to his furthest point in the real history of his country: viz. to the opening of the thirteenth century. He still works from Holinshed, but uses other materials, some of them previous dramas. The date may be 1593 or 1594.

Richard II.—First published in 1597. Having depicted one weak English King, Shakespeare leaps to the end of the fourteenth century and takes thence another of a different sort. In this play he attains

first, I think, to his fullest literary greatness. The play may be dated in 1594 or 1595. He still works from Holinshed.

Romeo and Juliet.—First published in 1597, and apparently written not long before, perhaps in 1596, but perhaps earlier. It is the first of Shakespeare's own so-called tragedies proper, as distinct from the *Titus Andronicus* and *Pericles* of his earlier concoction, and from his tragedies of English History; and here again, as in most of his romances, he goes to Italian ground. His materials were an old English poem on the subject and an English translation of an Italian novel.

Love's Labour's Lost.—Mentioned by Meres in 1598, and published that year: probably written the year before. From the peculiar structure of this comedy, the abundance of rhyme in it, the small number of lines with a supernumerary final syllable (5 *xa* +), and the small number of unstopped lines or lines with a cæsura any-

where save at the end, it has been argued by some that this must be a very early play of Shakespeare's. The last five tests would make it the very first of all; but, without going as far as that, some would refer it to about 1590. There are distinct or rather cogent proofs, however, bringing it down to about the year 1597; and the peculiar structure of the play, the rhyming and what not, were, I believe, deliberately adopted by Shakespeare to suit its character as a sylvan romance dashed with clever satire of literary affectations. It is an extremely interesting play, laid imaginatively on French ground, though full of contemporary English references; and we see it in the use of Lylye's *Euphues* and of other books of Shakespeare's time.

All's Well that Ends Well.—Not published till 1623, but supposed to be the comedy mentioned by Meres in 1598 as a pendant to *Love's Labour's Lost* under the title *Love's Labour's Won.* Perhaps the play

as we now have it was an improvement on an earlier. The ground is partly in France again, partly in Italy. Shakespeare used one of the translated tales of Boccaccio.

A Midsummer Night's Dream.—Mentioned by Meres in 1598, though not published till 1600. It must have been nearly contemporary with *Love's Labour's Lost*, which it resembles in so far as it is also a sylvan romance, though on a different principle, and more gorgeous and dream-like. The ground, so far as such an air-hung vision of faery creatures may be said to have a ground, is Greece in its mythic age, "Athens, and a wood near it," as the stage-heading directs. Shakespeare took hints, it is thought, from various romances and from English poems and translations popular in his time.

Merchant of Venice.—Mentioned by Meres in 1598, but not published till 1600: possibly its right place might be a little earlier in this list. Here Shakespeare is back on

Italian ground. He had hints for the story from Italian romances and from English poems of Marlowe and others.

Henry IV: Parts First and Second.—Mentioned as a whole by Meres in 1598 (or is it Part I only, under the general title?): Part I published that year; Part II not till 1600. Shakespeare resumes English History, where he had left it off in *Richard II;* and, whereas in that play the comic element had been entirely absent, he now revels in it, planting the immortal Falstaff and his brotherhood in the fourth Henry's reign. For public events he follows, as usual, Holinshed, and he took hints from a previous historical play in which a Sir John Oldcastle figured. It even appears that he at first retained that name, and that the change to Falstaff was a judicious afterthought, which took effect on the stage only gradually.

Henry V.—Not mentioned by Meres in 1598; written probably, therefore, late in that

year, or in 1599: published in 1600. "Scene England: afterwards France"; and, Falstaff heard of as dead in the beginning of the play, we follow his companion, the Prince, in his transmuted character of the King and hero of Agincourt, with some of the waifs of Falstaff's old retinue in his camp. Holinshed and a previous play are again the materials.

As You Like It.—Not published till 1623, but fixed pretty certainly by a mention in the *Stationers' Register* to about the year 1599. This is another beautiful comedy of what may be called sylvan romance, the scene being French or at least continental, mostly in the Forest of Arden. Shakespeare used mainly a novel called *Rosalind* by his contemporary Thomas Lodge, but took hints from various books.

Much Ado about Nothing.—Published in 1600, and probably written in 1599. A comedy of city intrigue and humours, the scene laid in Messina in Sicily: the story is

taken from an Italian source, with combinations of hints from other quarters.

Twelfth Night; or What you Will.—Not published till 1623, but heard of as acted at the Middle Temple in February 1602, and to be referred to about that date. Also a play mainly of city humours; the scene an Italian or Illyrian sea-coast. Plot suggested by previous plays and tales.

The Merry Wives of Windsor.—Published in a very imperfect form in 1602, not as we now have it till 1623. A genuine comedy of English life, and, though Falstaff appears in it *redivivus*, of what may be called contemporary English life. The Sir Toby Belch of *Twelfth Night* is but a variety of Falstaff; and the two plays were probably written about the same time, the *Merry Wives*, say, in 1602. It was probably the last play of Shakespeare that Elizabeth can have seen.

To complete the list of Shakespeare's writ-

ings before Elizabeth's death, we must remember the little collection of twenty-one stray lyrical pieces of his, published for him or in spite of him, in 1599, by the bookseller Jaggard, under the title of *The Passionate Pilgrim* (with the sub-title to the last six of them, *Sonnets to Sundry Notes of Music*); the single lyrical piece called *The Phœnix and the Turtle*, similarly published in a book of poems in 1601; and his *Sonnets*, especially so called, with *A Lover's Complaint* appended. *The Passionate Pilgrim* and *The Phœnix and the Turtle* may belong to any dates between 1593, if not earlier, and the times of their publication; and the dating of them is of small moment. Not so with the *Sonnets:* their dating is important. They were not published till 1609, and then certainly without Shakespeare's leave; but, as Meres in 1598 mentions Shakespeare's "sugared sonnets among his private friends," some of them may have been in existence then. Indeed there are distinct coincidences of thought and expression between two or three of the Sonnets (Nos. 127, 132, and 137) and passages in *Love's Labour's*

Lost, published in that year; while one of the Sonnets entire (No. 144), astray from the rest, had got into Jaggard's hands and was printed by him in *The Passionate Pilgrim* collection of 1599, next to another Sonnet taken from *Love's Labour's Lost*. As first printed collectively in 1609, the *Sonnets* (to which *A Lover's Complaint* was appended) were 154 in number. The last two, however, are casual sonnets, disconnected from the rest; and, when we speak of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in an emphatic sense, we mean the preceding series of 152, as distinct from these annexed two, and from seven other pieces in the same sonnet-form in *The Passionate Pilgrim*.

Now, it is very nearly capable of proof, I think, that this, the great series of Sonnets, though in progress as early as about 1597, was not completed till about or near 1603, and therefore that they belong, as a whole, to the close of the Elizabethan portion of Shakespeare's life. I locate them between 1597 (Shakespeare *ætat.* 33) and 1603 (Shakespeare *ætat.* 39), which was a time of peculiarly busy dramatic production with Shakespeare.

The entire seventeen years of this first cycle of Shakespeare's literary activity may be subdivided into two parts—*first*, an initial six years or so of apprenticeship and hackwork, during which he wrote or adapted about eight plays, but published nothing; and, secondly, a freer and very productive period of about ten years, during which fifteen more plays were written, ten of which, and also *Titus Andronicus*, out of the earlier set, were published in rapid succession between 1597 and 1602, while in the same period were written all his now extant non-dramatic poems without exception; and all of these too were published, except his main series of *Sonnets*. Twenty-two of his now acknowledged plays, and all his non-dramatic writings:—such is the summary till the death of Elizabeth.

It may be noted also that the list contains all those plays of Shakespeare that we should now call the worst or poorest, and these, without exception, belong to his early time of hackwork or apprenticeship—*Titus Andronicus*, *Part I of Henry VI*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*, to

which may be added, or may not be added, *Pericles.*

On the other hand, the list contains some of his very best and finest—*Richard II*, *Henry IV* (both Parts), *Henry V*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *As You Like It;* to which some would add *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Romeo and Juliet.* All these "very best" belong to the second division of the period, or between 1593 and 1603; but at least one of the plays of the earlier division, the *Second Part of Henry VI*, might rank with *Love's Labour's Lost* among the second best.

The list contains all Shakespeare's plays of English History, with the single exception of *Henry VIII*, and all these historical plays were written before 1600. This early addiction of himself by Shakespeare to the historical form of the drama, and to the history of his native country in particular, is worth remembering; and it is the more memorable because in his lifetime his English Historical Plays were, in the main, those by which he was best known and most popular with English readers. "A horse, a horse; my kingdom for a horse,"

from *Richard III*, was one of the Shakespearian phrases that had most fastened on people.

Though the list presents to us Shakespeare in all his varieties besides—in pathetic tragedy, as in *Romeo and Juliet*, and in highly ideal sylvan romance, as in *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *As You Like It*—one observes the large quantity of comedy, and the revel in humorous character and creation out of real life. Not only is there a vein of the humorous through almost all the tragic, or romantic, or historical plays (*Richard II* an exception); not only have we the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, and Holofernes and the rest in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and Launce and his dog in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and Launcelot Gobbo in the *Merchant of Venice*, and the immortal Bottom the Weaver and his companions in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Dogberry and his companions of the watch in *Much Ado about Nothing;* but we have already, fully fledged from Shakespeare's fancy, and given to the world for ever, Falstaff and his brotherhood in *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, and the *Merry Wives of*

Windsor, and the Sir Toby Belch variety of the same brotherhood in *Twelfth Night*. That element of comic perception and invention in which Shakespeare preceded Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Goldsmith, Dickens, and Thackeray, had been fully displayed in this first cycle of his Plays.

SECOND MAIN SERIES OR CYCLE: THOSE PRODUCED IN JAMES'S REIGN, 1603–1616: SHAKESPEARE *ætat.* 39–53.

Here we cannot be so certain; but, with the proviso that some of his *Sonnets* may possibly belong to the very beginning of this period, we may assign the following Plays to it:

FIRST GROUP: 1603–1609

Hamlet.—One would like to fix the exact date of the composition of this, perhaps the greatest of all Shakespeare's Plays; and it seems possible to do so. The original story of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, as told in the Latin Danish History of the

mediæval *Saxo Grammaticus*, had been accessible to scholars, in the first published edition of Saxo's work, since 1514, and had possibly been translated into English, though no English version of it earlier than 1608 is preserved. There had also been an English play, founded on this story, as early as 1587, when Shakespeare was first connecting himself with the stage. This first English play of *Hamlet*, known only by tradition, cannot have been Shakespeare's. It seems to have been rather a popular play, however; for we hear of it as acted at one of the London theatres (not Shakespeare's) in 1594, and there are allusions to it in pamphlets. Hence Shakespeare turned his attention to the subject, as he did freely to others already dramatised, if he was struck by their capability. This he did in 1602, when *his* Hamlet, *our* Hamlet, was written, produced by his company, and also registered in the Stationers' Books for publication. It was *not* published in that year, however, but appeared

in 1603, and then surreptitiously, and in a form so imperfect, as compared with the present full form, that there have been two hypotheses to account for the differences. Some have argued that this *Hamlet* of 1603, undoubtedly Shakespeare's, was his first draft of the play, and possibly a rather early production, and that the full *Hamlet*, as we now have it, was a second draft, enlarged and rewritten by him. This hypothesis is now pronounced untenable by those who have examined the matter most carefully; and they conclude that the published *Hamlet* of 1603 was merely an imperfect stolen copy of the real *Hamlet* as Shakespeare had written it, obtained from the actors, or hastily taken down in short-hand during the performances. At all events, in the following year, 1604, the real *Hamlet*, as we now have it, did appear, in a little quarto containing eighteen pages of more matter than the imperfect one of 1603.

From this statement it will appear that

Hamlet, though we put it first in the middle period, may belong to the very close of the first period, or may link the two periods. It was acted in some form approaching the present in 1602; but we are not sure of it in its present full form till 1604, when Shakespeare was exactly forty years old. It is worth note that Shakespeare here first moves to Germanic or Scandinavian ground. The scene is Denmark; and Germany, Poland, and Russia are in view.

Measure for Measure.—Heard of as acted at Whitehall in December 1604; first published 1623. The ground here is Austrian (Vienna), but the names and the air are Italian, and the plot is taken indirectly from an Italian novel.

Julius Cæsar.—Not published till 1623, but probably written about 1604. There had been several dramas on the subject. Shakespeare goes for his authority to North's translation of Plutarch.

Othello.—First published 1622, but probably written about the same time as *King Lear.* The ground here is again Italian (Venice), but with a move to the island of Cyprus. The story is from an Italian source.

Macbeth.—Almost certainly belongs to early in James's reign, and written in implied compliment to him and Scotland. The story is taken in the main from Holinshed, who took it from Bellendene's translation of Hector Boece's Latin History of Scotland.

King Lear.—Known to have been acted before King James at Christmas 1606; first published in 1608; based on previous versions of the story, all derived originally from Geoffrey of Monmouth's British History.

Troilus and Cressida.—First published in 1609, while it was still probably new; story and suggestions from Chaucer's poem with the same title, or from Lydgate and

others. The subject was a favourite one with European poets.

Antony and Cleopatra. — Heard of about 1608; first published 1623; authority again North's translation of Plutarch.

This brings us to about 1609, or through the first six years of James's reign; and it gives us seven plays in those six years, some of them perhaps written in London, but others more probably at Stratford-on-Avon, after Shakespeare's retirement thither, and sent or brought by him to London for performance. Note also that all or nearly all the plays of this period rank among the great plays, especially if our standard of greatness is intellectual fulness—wealth of thought and matter. Note further the tendency to high, serious, and tragic themes. Six of the seven are tragedies expressly; and even through the single one that may rank as comedy, *Measure for Measure*, there runs a tone of the nobly pensive.

SECOND GROUP: 1609–1616

This belongs to the last six years of Shakespeare's life, from his forty-fifth year to his death at the completion of his fifty-second year. Here too there is still some uncertainty and no possibility of sure precision; but the following seem to be Shakespeare's Plays produced during this period:

Coriolanus.—Probably written about 1609; first published 1623; North's Plutarch again the historical authority.

Timon of Athens.—Written in 1610(?); first published 1623; based on a previous English version of the tale, but with hints from North's Plutarch and perhaps from Lucian. Some think it not wholly Shakespeare's.

Cymbeline.—Heard of as acted in 1610 or 1611; first published in 1623. The story is from Holinshed after Geoffrey of Monmouth, with incidents interwoven from Boccaccio and others.

The Tempest.—Heard of as acted in 1611, but not published till 1623. The persons in the play are Italian; but the scene is an unknown island in mid-ocean. Books of voyages may have yielded suggestions, and Florio's translation of Montaigne is supposed to have been consulted.

The Winter's Tale.—Written about the same time as *The Tempest*, but possibly later, and by some thought to be Shakespeare's last, though there is some evidence of its being performed in 1611. *The Tempest* has been more generally held to be his last, but there are objections to that supposition. By the rhyme test *Winter's Tale* would be the last, as it contains no rhymed 5 *xa* lines at all. The ground here is partly Italy and partly Bohemia. Suggested by a novel of Greene's.

King Henry VIII.—In existence in 1613, and acted on June 29th in that year, when the Globe Theatre took fire and was burnt down in the course of the performance;

but the play may have been in existence earlier than this. The amount of Shakespeare's work in this historical play has been questioned: I think, unnecessarily.

It may be seen that Shakespeare persevered in dramatic production, if not to his death, at all events to within three years of it. It may be seen also that his power was unabated. All the six plays last mentioned may rank among his greatest: *Coriolanus*, *The Tempest*, and *Winter's Tale* most assuredly so. Further may be noted his continued intellectual fulness, his continued delight in abundance of the thoughtful and reflective in his matter. Visible as this had been all along in his dramas, notable even in his *Richard II* of 1597 and other plays of the earlier cycle, all but enormous in the plays generally of the first six years of James's reign (witness *Hamlet* throughout), the quality still solicits us most strikingly in the plays of Shakespeare's last five or six years. Take the *Winter's Tale:* I hardly know a play of Shakespeare's so abundant and

complex intellectually, so exuberant, and at the same time so knotty and corrugated with sheer thought. In it too I discern, what I think I discern in the later plays generally, a carelessness of mere stage exigencies, and even of the tastes and capacities of readers, a falling back of Shakespeare on himself as the sole critic that had any right of judgment, a kind of exultation, not unmixed with contempt of the *vulgus*, in saying all he wanted to say, and writing exclusively for his own satisfaction. One notes also the preference still for high and tragic, or at least serious, themes—three of the plays of the group (*Cymbeline*, *Coriolanus*, *Timon*) ranking among the Tragedies; one (*Henry VIII*) being a stately History-play; while two that rank among the Comedies (*Tempest* and *Winter's Tale*) have an unusual solemnity of significance.

The fact of his taking two of his subjects for tragedies (*Julius Cæsar* in the first group, and *Coriolanus* at the beginning of the second group) from Roman history is not uninteresting. If we except the two very early plays, *Titus Andronicus* and *Pericles*, which are

Shakespeare's only inasmuch as he touched up old stock-pieces with these titles, Shakespeare's earliest subjects had been either from English history within the range of two or three centuries preceding his own time, or from modern popular romances and novels of Italian origin, their scenes laid chiefly in Italy—his *Merry Wives of Windsor*, which is his only entire comedy on real English ground, being, in fact, an offshoot from the Falstaff of his English histories. In his middle group of subjects, however, we see him tending back farther into the past, whether into the legendary or mythic foretime of Britain, as in *Macbeth* and *Lear*, or to Greek and Roman ground, as in *Troilus and Cressida* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. This tendency remains with him in his late years, so that in *Cymbeline* we have British time melting back into Roman, in *Coriolanus* and *Julius Cæsar* two expressly Roman subjects from Plutarch, and in *Timon of Athens*, a plunge into Greek antiquity in a romance with a historic border. Plutarch was at the last one of Shakespeare's favourite books.

The fact that we have no writings of Shakespeare from the last two and a half, or perhaps the last four or five, years of his life, is worth noting. It seems not at all impossible that he continued to write to the very last, and that dramas of his on which he was engaged in those last years have been lost. It is even more probable that lyrical and other non-dramatic pieces of his left among his papers at Stratford have perished. The small collection of such pieces that we have cannot have been the only things of the kind from his pen in his lifetime. All that is speculation, more or less regretful; but what of the so-called "Doubtful Plays"—to wit: certain plays, extant in print, but not included in our chronology, which have been ascribed, for one reason or another, at least in part, to Shakespeare? If the definition of a "Doubtful Play" were to be its not being included in the First Folio of 1623, in which Shakespeare's surviving "fellows", Heminge and Condell, professed to publish all his plays collectively, *Pericles* would be one of them. The omission of that in the First Folio was perhaps an oversight, and we have seen

that it has generally been voted to be, in some real sense, Shakespeare's. We have seen also that some of the others, included in the authentic list, may, in a similar sense, be challenged as "doubtful." The "Doubtful Plays" generally so called, however, are some that have never received the honour of being put into the authentic list. No fewer than twenty-seven such plays have, at one time or other, on some pretext or other, or by one idiot or other, been named and put forward as possibly Shakespeare's in whole or in part; but, the list having been gradually reduced by referring some of these to their real authors, or by showing that the reference of some of the others to Shakespeare was a mere act of idiocy or haste, there are now only five plays respecting which it is held that doubt may be kept up. These are *Arden of Feversham*, first published anonymously in 1592; *Locrine* (a tragedy of British Legend), published anonymously in 1595; *The Reign of Edward III*, a historical tragedy published anonymously in 1596; *The Yorkshire Tragedy*, a piece of one act performed in 1608; and *The Two*

Noble Kinsmen, first published in 1634 and then ascribed to Shakespeare and Fletcher jointly. Respecting even these the tendency more and more is to clear Shakespeare from all concern in them, unless in so far as one might be willing to regard *King Edward III* as an early and unacknowledged History-play by Shakespeare in the time of his apprenticeship, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* as a piece of Fletcher's in which he received some assistance from Shakespeare in his maturity. On the whole, we shall not miss much if we content ourselves with the thirty-seven plays generally acknowledged. The revelation from these as to Shakespeare himself may be as full as we can possibly desire.

CHAPTER IV

SHAKESPEARE THROUGH HIS WRITINGS

In what way may the Plays and Poems of Shakespeare be investigated to make them yield their evidences of Shakespeare personally?

There may be a search in the Plays and Poems for allusions to persons, places, and other particulars in what may be called Shakespeare's private personal environment from his youth upwards. In the chapter of the Cambridge edition of Shakespeare entitled "Remarks on Names and Places belonging to Warwickshire alluded to in several Plays" it is shown that Shakespeare had a fondness for his native town and for his native county generally, and that, in selecting names for minor characters in some of his Plays, he helped himself to those of actual persons in and about Stratford that he had known

familiarly in his boyhood, or that were associated in his memory with local traditions. Perhaps the most striking instances are the names *Fluellen* and *Bardolph* in *Henry IV.* A George Bardolph and a William Fluellen were well-known townsmen of Stratford in Shakespeare's youth, and are found closely connected with Shakespeare's father in the town-records. In the same play *Justice Shallow* is an undoubted representation of Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote, near Stratford, who figures in the deer-stealing legend about Shakespeare: they are identified by the "white lucies" (pikes) in their coats of arms. The names *Porus*, *Peto*, *Travers*, and *Harcourt*, in the same play, are old Stratford or Warwickshire names. So in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Ford*, *Page*, *Herne*, and *Parson Hugh Evans* have their names from persons whom Shakespeare must have seen and known well in Stratford; *Sly* in *Taming of the Shrew* is also a Stratford recollection; *Jaques* and *De Boys* in *As You Like It* are names from Warwickshire; in *Henry V*, *Bates*, *Court*, and *Williams*, in *Henry VI*, *Vernon*, *Basset*, and *Tressel*,

and in *Henry VIII*, *Brandon*, are gratuitous importations from the same county. Allusions to places—not only to such places of historic mark as *Warwick*, *Coventry*, and *Kenilworth*, but also to much obscurer places, hardly to be known to any but a Warwickshire man—are no less frequent. All this is not uninteresting. It reveals a very human trait in Shakespeare, seen largely in Sir Walter Scott and others—what may be called district-patriotism, fondness for his native place, a tenacity to his early recollections and associations. But the search might be extended, so as to detect possible allusions, under dramatic names, to acquaintances of Shakespeare during his London life, and also to illustrate Shakespeare's travels in England generally and beyond. He must have been in many parts of England at one time or another, besides London and Warwickshire; and a collection of his topographical phrases and allusions might yield curious items of information. Scene 1 of Act II of *Henry IV*, *First Part*, opens at Rochester, in an inn-yard, where, very early in the morning, before it is light, a carrier appears, with a lantern in

his hand, going to the stable to waken the ostler and get out his cart and horse for his journey to London. "Heigh-ho!" he says to himself, "an't be not four by the day, I'll be hanged: Charles's wain is over the new chimney, and yet our horse is not packed."

Must not Shakespeare have known such an inn at Rochester, and seen or imagined Charles's wain over some particular new chimney? Again, when Falstaff, in Part Second of the same play, says of Poins, "He a good wit? hang him, baboon! his wit 's as thick as Tewkesbury mustard," was it the thickness of some made mustard from Tewkesbury sold in London that Shakespeare was thinking of, or the thickness of some mustard he had once tasted at Tewkesbury when on a ramble in Gloucestershire? These instances may suggest better. So, in connexion with the scenery in *Macbeth*, may be the question, suggested by independent and external record, whether Shakespeare visited Scotland in 1601, when Laurence Fletcher and others of his theatrical co-partners were certainly there on a starring excursion which took them as far

north as Aberdeen, and whether Shakespeare then formed some acquaintance with the "blasted heath" and other peculiarly Scottish scenery of the play, and also received hints as to Scotch witches and their ways from some great witch-trials then going on at Aberdeen. So, again, finally, in connexion with scenes in other plays, the speculation as to tours by Shakespeare in France and Italy.

There might be an inquiry through the plays, &c., for evidences as to the extent and variety of Shakespeare's reading and book-learning, and as to his critical notions of literature, and especially of the English poetry of his own time. As to the extent and variety of his reading there has been a good deal of investigation. The old books, tales, &c., from which he took the plots and situations of his plays have been traced and reprinted in various ways. There have been several essays on the learning of Shakespeare. Special forms of the inquiry have been made as to Shakespeare's knowledge of Latin, French, Italian, and even Greek. On the

whole, the conclusion has been that, though Shakespeare was not a "learned" man in the scholastic sense—though Ben Jonson's statement that he had little Latin and less Greek is to be accepted as true—yet, even scholastically, he was well educated up to what in those days would have been the mark of entrance to the University,—knew Latin tolerably, and French and Italian sufficiently for an occasional purpose, and for the rest was a wide and wakeful, if not a prodigious, reader in English literature and contemporary English books. Not so systematically prosecuted, but already illustrated by a good deal of dispersed observation, has been the inquiry into Shakespeare's critical notions of contemporary English literature and forms or tendencies of the English poetry round about him. Quotations or quasi-quotations from Spenser, Marlowe, and others have been traced in his plays, some of them half laughing or satirical. A play particularly rich in this kind of interest, and indeed full of very pointed satire on some literary affectations of Shakespeare's time, such as Euphuism and its developments, is *Love's Labour's Lost.*

What can this be but a parody on some stanza-form of the time, favoured by some Elizabethans?—

> "The armipotent Mars, of lances the almighty,
> Gave Hector a gift, the heir of Ilion,
> A man so breathed, that certain he would fight; yea
> From morn till night, out of his pavilion."

A close scrutiny of that play and of the others for quotations, literary references, parodies of phrases and literary forms, and critical notes more or less sarcastic, might be very instructive. It would prove, if proof were needed, that Shakespeare had distinct critical notions of his own art, and was sharp and fastidious enough in observing offences against these notions, even in matters of mechanism. There might be a collection of his critical maxims about Art and Poetry.

Information might be gathered by an observation of those passages where, from the nature of the situations, it is inevitable that Shakespeare must have thought, more or less, while he was writing, of himself, his circum-

stances, and the history of his life. Such passages are not so frequent in Shakespeare as in many other writers; but they do occur. When, in *Twelfth Night*, the Duke says:

> "Let still the woman take
> An elder than herself: so wears she to him,
> So sways she level in her husband's heart,"

can we avoid feeling that there is some reference to Shakespeare's own too early and hasty marriage? And when, in *The Winter's Tale*, Polixenes, King of Bohemia, thus describes his fondness for his little boy:

> "If at home, sir,
> He's all my exercise, my mirth, my matter:
> Now my sworn friend, and then mine enemy;
> My parasite, my soldier, statesman, all:
> He makes a July's day short as December;
> And with his varying childness cures in me
> Thoughts that would thick my blood."

Do we not more than seem to see Shakespeare remembering his own fireside and his play and prattle there once with his dead boy Hamnet? But perhaps among the passages where reference to Shakespeare's own ex-

perience and surroundings is most obvious and least durable are those, scattered through several plays, in which he introduces actors and the paraphernalia and humours of the theatrical profession. There are players in *Hamlet*, and the play within the play there; there is the theatrical setting or framework for the interior play in the *Taming of the Shrew;* there is all the fun of the clownish performances and the rivalry of the rustic actors in *Midsummer Night's Dream;* Pistol in the Falstaff plays is evidently a braggart habitué of the theatres astray in other company, with scraps of blank verse and theatrical talk in his mouth; and again and again elsewhere the Stage furnishes Shakespeare with ideas and comparisons. A thorough examination of all these passages would let us see Shakespeare in his capacity as actor, playwriter, and theatre proprietor, and admit us to his notions of the Bohemian world round him in that capacity, of the interests of his profession, and of the relations of that profession to society at large and to the public tastes and needs. For example, in the following passage in *Hamlet*

there is a distinct reference to the public taste of the time for boy actors, and a defence of the interests of the legitimate drama against certain interferences by public authority, and against certain aberrations of the public task in favour of more childish and grotesque entertainments of the dramatic sort:

Hamlet. What players are they?

Rosencrantz. Even those you were wont to take delight in, the tragedians of the city.

Hamlet. How chances it they travel? Their residence, both in reputation and profit, was better both ways.

Rosencrantz. I think their inhibition comes by the means of the late innovation.

Hamlet. Do they hold the same estimation they did when I was in the city? Are they so followed?

Rosencrantz. No, indeed, they are not.

Hamlet. How comes it? Do they grow rusty?

Rosencrantz. Nay, their endeavour keeps in the wonted pace: but there is, sir, an aiery of children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of the question, and are most tyrannically clapped for't: these are now the fashion; and so berattle the common stages—so they call them—that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goosequills and dare scarce come thither.

Hamlet. What, are they children? Who maintains 'em? How are they escoted? Will they pursue the quality no longer than they can sing? Will they not say afterwards, if they should grow themselves to common players—as it is most like, if their means are no better—their writers do

them wrong, to make them exclaim against their own succession?

Rosencrantz. 'Faith, there has been much to do on both sides; and the nation holds it no sin to tarre them to controversy: there was, for a while, no money bid for argument, unless the poet and the player went to cuffs in the question.

Hamlet. Is't possible?

Guildenstern. O, there has been much throwing about of brains.

Hamlet. Do the boys carry it away?

Rosencrantz. Ay, that they do, my lord; Hercules and his load too.

Then there is that very memorable passage, already quoted,[1] from the first scene in *Timon of Athens*, in which Shakespeare introduces not a player or dramatist in especial, but a representative or typical poet as such. It is a striking passage, and, as has already been shown, is all but demonstrably a passage of self-reference, and as certifying to us, through an imaginary character, that theory of the impersonality or idealised generality of all true poetry, that distaste for mere paragraph or occurrence poetry, which we have already found reason to attribute to Shakespeare from the External Evidence.

[1] See p. 62.

There might be a collection and study of those passages in which, by exception from his general custom, Shakespeare does glance at public personages, public events, or public interests and controversies of his own time. As we have seen, we have no such body of occasional and epigrammatic poems from him as from Ben Jonson and others of his contemporaries; and any observations he did choose to make on public things about him he reserved for use in his dramatic phantasies. Even there, however, the references that can be called political are very rare. There is abundance of representation of the contemporary customs and humours of English society. Going about with Falstaff and his companions in London, in Windsor, or elsewhere, we feel ourselves to be reading a novel of humours and characters drawn as expressly out of the London and English life that was round about Shakespeare as the humours and characters of any of Smollett's novels were drawn out of the life round about Smollett, only with a different genius. Nay, in all Shakespeare's plays, in defiance of time and place, the mere

manners and humours are always in a sense contemporary and English, as if it were his poetic rule, in that respect, to treat all humanity as synchronous. In painting the life of his own time, he made it serve for the life of all time; and the critic, coming after him, and knowing this, can localise the scattered lineaments and reduce many of Shakespeare's imaginings into hints from his surroundings. Autolycus, in *The Winter's Tale*, is, after all, an English pedlar, such as Shakespeare might have seen selling ballads and cheating country-wives at Warwickshire fairs; and Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida* is, with all his Greekish dress, but such a smarting misanthropic make-mischief as Shakespeare may have known coming from his lodging in Shoreditch to drop in occasionally among the actors at Blackfriars. In respect of manners, humours, and characters, therefore, Shakespeare's draft upon contemporary suggestion is simply boundless. But how rare is a stroke of either "levelled malice" or "levelled eulogy" at any of the great public movements distinctive of the time in which

he lived, or at the public personages in whom they are represented! Of that controversy, for example, between the authorised State-Church and Puritanism, which was perhaps the paramount political phenomenon in England through Shakespeare's life, we hardly hear in his plays; we should hardly know from them that it existed. Nor is the reason of this solely that allusions to such a thing in his plays, all flung back as they are beyond his own time, would have been anachronisms. He is perfectly free with anachronisms when he likes; and it so happens that he does use the phrases "Puritan" and "Brownist"—both in *Twelfth Night*—both in defiance of time and place. In these and in other such cases, however, little or nothing can be inferred as to Shakespeare's own sympathies one way or the other, partly because the references are always made dramatically, and may be taken to express only the sympathies of the imaginary person who is speaking, and not the author's; and partly because the references themselves are generally so casual and slight. So far as inferences can be drawn from such passages as

to Shakespeare's own political sympathies, the summary impression, favoured by all the other evidence, is that he was practically a Conformist, a friend of established order and authority, sharing the massive general sentiments of the majority of contemporary Englishmen, and for keeping all things easily in the main line. There are wonderful contrary touches; but that is the summary impression. So in that passage, at the end of *Henry VIII*, which is perhaps the most notorious instance of "levelled eulogy" in all Shakespeare's plays. It is Cranmer's prophetic speech to the King over the little infant Elizabeth, who has just been born:

> "Let me speak, Sir,
> For Heaven now bids me; and the words I utter
> Let none think flattery, for they'll find 'em truth.
> This royal infant—heaven still move about her!—
> Though in her cradle, yet now promises
> Upon this land a thousand thousand blessings,
> Which time shall bring to ripeness: she shall be—
> But few now living can behold that goodness—
> A pattern to all princes living with her,
> And all that shall succeed: Saba was never
> More covetous of wisdom and fair virtue
> Than this pure soul shall be: all princely graces

That mould up such a mighty piece as this is,
With all the virtues that attend the good,
Shall still be doubled on her: truth shall nurse her,
Holy and heavenly thoughts still counsel her:
She shall be loved and feared: her own shall bless her;
Her foes shake like a field of beaten corn,
And hang their heads with sorrow: good grows with her;
In her days every man shall eat in safety,
Under his own vine, what he plants; and sing
The merry songs of peace to all his neighbours:
God shall be truly known; and those about her
From her shall read the perfect ways of honour,
And by those claim their greatness, not by blood.
Nor shall this peace sleep with her: but, as when
The Bird of Wonder dies, the maiden Phœnix,
Her ashes new create another heir,
As great in admiration as herself,
So shall she bear her blessedness to one,
When heaven shall call her from this cloud of darkness,
Who from the sacred ashes of her honour
Shall star-like rise, as great in fame as she was,
And so stand fixed. Peace, plenty, love, truth, terror,
That were the servants to this chosen infant,
Shall then be his, and like a vine grow to him:
Wherever the bright sun of heaven shall shine,
His honour and the greatness of his name
Shall be, and make new nations: he shall flourish,
And, like a mountain-cedar, reach his branches
To all the plains about him: our children's children
Shall see this, and bless heaven."

In this extraordinary passage, so vastly out of Shakespeare's usual way, we see—unless we

deny the play or part of it to be his—Shakespeare not only avowedly falling in with the massive and universal enthusiasm of his contemporaries and countrymen over the reign and royalty of Queen Elizabeth, but also taking the general courtly view of that reign and royalty of King James which, though a continuation of the same in time, was by no means a continuation in policy. Observing, however, that what is said about King James comes in as almost a necessary courtly appendage to what was said more naturally about Queen Elizabeth, we may say generally that the passage presents Shakespeare to us as by self-confession a typical or representative Elizabethan. Yes! this genius of the universal, who was not for an age but for all time, yet was, and knew itself to be, rooted in what we now call Elizabethanism.

We come now to a more important, more solid, and more thorough method than any of those hitherto mentioned: viz., the study of the Plays and Poems individually for their *meanings*, the study of them as far as possible

in the chronological order of their production for the light they may thus throw on the changes of Shakespeare's mood and the progress of his mind, and the deduction from them collectively, after such study of them individually, of Shakespeare's inmost purposes and views of things, his philosophy of life and history. This requires a little explanation.

Our practical British mind rather revolts from that style of literary criticism, supposed to be especially German, and certainly largely exemplified in German commentaries on Shakespeare in particular, which consists in seeking for the so-called central ideas or fundamental ideas of plays, poems, or novels.

"Fundamental ideas, central ideas—nonsense!" such is the common British vote when this kind of criticism comes across it. "Shakespeare wrote to amuse, delight, and rouse; he invented, he dreamt, he imagined; he took fancies as they came, by instinct; he let the whole shape itself as his teeming mind, his artistic sense, and his notion of what would suit the stage, directed; he did not put meanings or purposes into his plays; and he would

have been astonished at the deep meanings and purposes which the German critics, with their subjectivity, objectivity, and all the rest of it, have found in them for him. No, no! let us read, enjoy, be impressed, mark the beauties, the artistic adaptation of means to effects, the defects or blemishes here and there if we like; but let us have no German philosophising in quest of central ideas, and what-not, round which the wholes may be taken as crystallised!"

Now, however fair such talk may sometimes be in retort upon some lumbering specimens of the German mode of criticism, it is essentially shallow and unscientific. This may be shown in various ways. Free as the Imagination, or Poetic Faculty, certainly is, it is yet dependent on the Personality. What a man shall or can imagine, equally with what he shall or can desire, depends ultimately on his own nature, and so even on his acquisitions and experiences. Though the Imagination may fly round and round the Personality, to apparently incredible distances, like a white-winged seabird round a rock, it is still tied to the rock by invisible attachments. Else there could be no differ-

ences in the poetry of different poets. But there are. Byron's imaginations are not and could not have been Wordsworth's, nor Wordsworth's Byron's. A poet who has no fondness for music will not imagine fugues, nor will one afflicted by colour-blindness delight in gorgeous blazes and rainbows. Imagination is not, after all, creation out of nothing, but only recombination, at the bidding of moods and of conscious purposes, out of the materials furnished by memory, reading, and experience; which materials vary with the individual cases. The so-called creations of a poet, therefore, belong to him, and do, in however subtle a way, reveal himself. So, indeed, says Shakepeare:

> "Our poesy is as a gum, which oozes
> From whence 'tis nourished." [1]

Again, take the matter in a simpler way. After reading a play, novel, or poem, there is a certain resulting total impression on the mind. To define this impression, to state it out fully and exactly, is true criticism; and criticism is not deep or complete till this is

[1] *Timon of Athens*, i. 1.

done. But in doing this, it is certainly involved that we get at the intention of the poet, or at least at the *meaning* of his work, whether it existed in the shape of formal intention or not.

Still more intelligible, with respect to such a work as a play or a novel, may be that view of the subject which regards such a work as literally a creation of the poet or novelist. It is a little world of men and women made by him, these men and women moving on a certain platform of scenery, thinking, scheming, acting and interacting, dividing themselves sometimes into opposed groups or parties, one to the right and the other to the left, while controlling agencies interfere in the midst, and there are onlookers and casual people in the background. Well, in such a world of his own creation, the Poet is also his own Providence and Judge; he makes things happen as he chooses; he administers law as he likes; he rewards, he punishes; he disposes of his own creatures at the end by a catastrophe or consummation in which some perish or are left miserable, and others survive

and are made happy. Well, we can note how he does exercise this Providence, and so obtain a glimpse of his moral views of things, his philosophy of life and history. And this equally whether the object of his creation is to illustrate real nature and life, or whether he arranges so as to vindicate a higher ethics, and administers what is called poetic justice. In the one case we have at least his views of how things do happen, how the world does go on really—which is an important revelation in itself; in the other, we have his views of how things ought to go on—which is a deeper revelation. Now, surely, Shakespeare's plays may be studied in this way; they can hardly be said to be *studied* unless there is this kind of philosophical inquiry into them. Seldom perhaps will it be found that it is possible to express the effect or drift of one of his plays in any one moral or maxim of which it can be said to be the vehicle. In this consists the measureless difference of his artistic genius from that of the Satirists or Morality-mongers. Occasionally, indeed, one cannot but feel as if some leading maxim had been present to his

mind. In reading *Measure for Measure*, for example, one seems to hear, throughout the play as in the title, the Christian text "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." Without saying that the play is wholly a construction in the interest of that text of mercy and mutual forgiveness, we feel it running through all like a golden thread. So, in the *Merchant of Venice*, our attention is almost solicited to the maxim that the strict letter of the Law cannot always be maintained, that there is truth in the adage, *Summum jus summa injuria.* In such cases we might almost allow the German critics their favourite phrase, "central idea," or "fundamental idea." On the whole, to get rid of any prejudice against the phrase, we may say that every play of Shakespeare contains a *meaning*, and that the proper study of every play involves the *interpretation* of it so as to get at this meaning, whether it can be expressed briefly in the shape of one leading idea, or whether it requires more complex wording. Then, further, every meaning so evolved from a play is a revelation of Shakespeare's philosophy, of

his mode of thinking, and so of himself; and, if all the plays are duly studied in this manner, and their meanings rolled, as it were, into one, Shakespeare himself may stand before us very amply indeed.

What strikes us all through Shakespeare is the *intensity* of his conception of Nature and Life. Never was a world so vivid, so pictorially real, so visually distinct, as that of Shakespeare's plays. You see everything that can be seen—individual objects, glitteringly clear in form and colour; expanses, landscapes, cities, streets, sea shores, the sea itself; woody wildernesses, with paths in them, and great tree-trunks; human beings moving in the streets and cities, and their varied dresses and physiognomies; human beings by the sea or on it in ships; and human beings, with other animals, dispersed through the wilderness of vegetation: there are the clouds and stars above, a most distinct overhanging vault, laughing with light blue and sunshine in the day, or glooming into dark and infinite sparkle by night: when storms come, this overhanging

grows murky, crows fly to their rooky home, and anon heaven and earth are commingled, the thickness of the union is palpable, the water falls in spouts and cataracts, and there is the glare of lightning in forks, flashes, and zig-zags. Sound, too, is incessant in this world, from the purling of brooks and the whispering of leaves, and the singing of small birds, to the thunderous noise and uproar; it is full, as well, of odours and tastes; and all can be struck or touched. Never, I say, was a physical world so real, so sensuously rich, distinct, solid, minute, and varied. And then the life in it—the horses, deer and all other inferior animation by the way, but above all humanity and its phases and actions. The energy of the human life in Shakespeare's plays is something unparalleled in literature; the pitch of nervous intensity is Greek in its fineness, clearness, and rapidity, but passing also into Gothic tremendousness, weight, and strength.

Blended with this rich and intensely real world of natural scenery and human energy, there is always, in Shakespeare's imagination,

an incalculable proportion of the demonic element, supra-human or infra-human. Hence his ghosts, his apparitions, his fairies, his monsters, his witches. It is only into some of his plays that this element visibly enters; from most it is absent. But, all through, it will be found that in Shakespeare's imagination the world of real existence is not exhausted nor summed up in Humanity on the Earth at any one moment, and in what that Humanity perceives. There are interferences from above and from beneath; there are aerial agents and messengers; to some depth at least round the visible sphere of things there is a rim or verge of the non-human or the quondam-human; all does not end in the churchyards, and even they in the moonlight may yield their dead. Again there must be no vulgar or literal construction; and we are to remember Shakespeare's wonderful sanity of intellect, his possession in a degree equal to his genius of that core of good sense and firm judgment which is always a central characteristic of the greatest poetic genius; while it is would-be genius generally, or very weak and hysteric genius, that loses the

sane and usual hold of things, thinks that genius consists in that aberration, and lives with ghosts all days of the week and all hours of the day, as things mechanical, noisy, and familiar, like rats in the walls. In a very different way, but in some subtle and highly significant way, did Shakespeare's perfectly sane cosmology, or conception of the real Universe, postulate an interpenetration of more than is seen or known.

This intensely real world, with that interpenetration of the mysterious as forming part of it, Shakespeare throws back with ease and delight to any point of past time. How powerfully the historic feeling possessed him, what a delight to him it was to fling himself back to any point of past time, whether only a generation before himself, or in extreme antiquity, and there on any part of the earth to imagine and paint out the rush and bustle of human affairs round ideal characters or round traditional personages of great mark, all his plays attest. It is notable, too, that, according to the universal habit of those days, when

speculation as to the age of the earth and the origin and antiquity of man had hardly begun, his imagination of historic time was bounded at a certain distance back, but that through all that time it took things boldly and unhesitatingly as going on very much the same as at present.

"The poor world is almost six thousand years old."
As You Like It, iv. 1.

"Since the old days of goodman Adam to the pupil age of this present twelve o'clock at midnight."
Henry IV, Part I, ii. 4.

These may be but *façons de parler*, to save trouble; and generally the measure of the past is more vague and indefinite. Thus:

"The acts commencèd on this ball of earth."
Henry IV, Part II, Induction.

or:

"A great while ago the world begun,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain."
Twelfth Night.

Still a definite beginning somehow all at once is poetically assumed; between that beginning and Shakespeare's own time the ceaseless rush and change of things is what

fascinates him and holds him with wonder; and anywhere in that rush he will plant himself and be at home. Rush and change; the words are true to his fancy. Yet the change is but change of form, trapping, costume; hardly of substance. It is the varying succession of wave-forms, the water remaining the same; it is the falling of leaves season after season, to be succeeded by the new leaves of the same continuing forest. Humanity is the same, though the units and the generations pass away and are buried. Nothing is more striking in Shakespeare than this sense of an identical humanity through all the ages. For thousands of years it is one and the same world, our present world, that has been rolling on—not only the same physical ball, with the heavens about it, and the cycle of the four seasons catching and recatching it, but the same storm and play of human energies upon it, and the same intermingling of demonic agencies with those. It burst out of gloom, or nothingness, or mystery, at one end, full-fledged as we now see it; that seems a great while ago, and, counting time within the world,

we can speak of centuries and ages; but, as a whole, it is one thing, one pageant, all a synchronism. We make take any trifle from one part of it and attribute it to any other, poetically. Ulysses may quote Aristotle; there may be cannons in *Macbeth;* and in the farthest back legend people may carry pistols. It is but borrowing and lending a little backwards and forwards within the same concern.

The world of Shakespeare's conception, past and present, is, on the whole, a gracious and likeable one, with a manifest rule of good and evil and a power of calm and beneficent order through all its perturbations; and Shakespeare's own preferences and affinities in it are for what is high, divine, beautiful, honourable, lovely, and of good report. Not only in the Comedies, where the very basis is pleasurable, and only minor griefs, misunderstandings, and meannesses play over that basis, but also in the Histories and Tragedies, where passions are more vehement, crime and vengeance are at wrestle, and the main persons are agonists

for life or death, the supposition always is of an actual world which, with all its annoyances and miseries, and though a platform for great crimes and for agonising and fighting groups, yet contains a vast quantity of the enjoyable for the largest number of its denizens, and affords a thousand varieties of opportunity, some common to all and others private and peculiar, for quietness, blessedness, and well-doing. The crimes are the perturbations, illustrated chiefly in the fighting groups; the absolute villains or Iagos even there are the exceptions; the noble and the criminal often exist in combination; the almost purely noble are hurried often by mere error to their doom; rectitude in some form generally survives, if only in the person of some one of the minor characters who may represent Providence at the end and be spokesman among the bodies of the slain; and to the storm succeeds the more normal calm. Generally, with all the pain, conflict, and crime, the world around is fair and healthy, the larks are singing in the air, and the white lambs are feeding. Then, if we pass to Shakespeare's personal likings and

affinities as shown in what was optional to himself, his choice of subjects, and his jurisdiction in his own free creations, the goodness of his heart, the high tone of his ethics, his sympathy always with what is lovely and of good report, are equally conspicuous. Infinite tolerance, indeed, is there; infinite pity, a universal humorousness that will recognise all fact whatever just because it is fact, and not be too austere about even the rascally or ignoble, if it has a comic side—whence those occasional gross passages that may be marked, though in that respect Shakespeare is virginal purity itself compared with some of his contemporaries; but, in the main, most perceptible are a magnanimity and moral elevation that are almost religious, and, amid all that is happening on earth, a sweet and solemn glance upwards to Heaven.

A test of difference which may often be usefully applied to the creations of novelists is this:—Is the kind of world represented in this novel a kind that one would have liked to be in and belong to; are the characters and people such as it would have been pleasant to be amidst?

Curiously enough, by this test (which is, of course, not the only one, nor the test of genius all in all), Sterne would be preferable to either Fielding or Smollett; it would have been far pleasanter to be among Uncle Toby and the rest, such is their real goodness, than in the coarse George II kind of society that prevails in most of Fielding's and Smollett's fictions. Now, by the same test, Shakespeare's ideal societies and gatherings of people in his plays are far more likeable, of a far finer humanity altogether, of less pitchy, defiling, and debasing companionship, even the most vicious and least respectable of them, than the ideal societies and human gatherings in Ben Jonson's plays, or in Beaumont and Fletcher's, or in those of any other Elizabethan dramatist. Falstaff and his tag-rag of Bardolphs, Nyms, and Pistols were not a reputable set; but it would have been really pleasant and refreshing, or at least it would have done you no harm, if you had been duly on your guard, to have a stroll with them through the fields, or to have looked on and listened while they were sitting together on a bench outside a country hostelry,

and the Knight was in full humour. The Prince emerged from among them to be the great and kingly Henry.

Then among Shakespeare's higher characters what admirable and lovable examples of all the human virtues—faithful friendship, enduring love, soundness in the dearest relationships of life, courage, chastity, patience, piety, gentleness, contemplative serenity, performance of duty, mercifulness, and self-sacrifice. Here it is that Ulrici's language about Shakespeare, identifying his ethics with the *moral* essence of Christianity, and even occasionally with the *doctrines* with which the morality is bound up, might not seem amiss.

"Poor soul! the centre of my sinful earth,
Fool'd by these rebel powers that lead thee stray!"

Sonnet 146.

"Alas! alas!
Why, all the souls that are were forfeit once,
And He that might the vantage best have took
Found out the remedy. How would you be
If He which is the top of judgment should
But judge you as you are? O, think on that;
And mercy then will breathe within your lips,
Like man new-made."

Measure for Measure, ii. 2.

To pass, however, from Shakespeare's Ethics to a word on his Politics. On all hands the evidence is that he was aristocratic, or at least anti-democratic. He has wonderful contrary touches, incisive references to social wrongs caused by misgovernment or tyranny, and expressions of deep ultimate sympathy with the toiling and often suffering multitude; but overt action by the mass or the mob for the political conduct of the world seems to have been distasteful to him, unimaginable by him except as blatancy, confusion, indirect instruction to the real rulers as to the requirements and probabilities of things, and a medium for their machinations.

CHAPTER V

THE PROGRESS IN SHAKESPEARE'S MOODS: "RECURRENCES AND FERVOURS"

It is not to be forgotten that there was a progress in Shakespeare's conception of life, and in his personal mood in relation to the world, as he advanced in years; and that in the later plays especially there is a gravity, a severity, with something even of a sternness and gloom, not to be found in the earlier or even in the middle plays, though the ultimate mood is perhaps a contemplative serenity.

Let us consider the chronological succession of Shakespeare's plays, and attend to the moods of the author's mind in the order in which the succession appears to present them. To assist us in this it may be allowable to fasten on those plays in which, from their nature, we are apt to discern most of sub-

jective revelation, and in some of the particular characters of which we can most easily suppose Shakespeare throwing off phases of his own constitution and practising self-delineation and self-criticism. On this principle, and without letting instinctive or individual fancy go for more than it is worth, the following sketch may be offered:

In the earliest literary stage of Shakespeare's life, bringing him to about 1596 or 1597, or to his thirty-second or thirty-third year, we may discern what may be called *The Romeo-Proteus-Biron mood*, or a mood compounded of the passionate impetuosity, the all-for-love recklessness, of Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet*, the instability and variability of Proteus in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and the wit, irony, and sharp-sightedness of Biron in *Love's Labour's Lost*. Though we know that through this time the prudential in Shakespeare's character was singularly large and strong, that he was industriously making his way in the London dramatic world, and saving and investing money, we cannot avoid supposing a core of

the Romeo element in his constitution, and a consciousness of the same on his own part; and, if we add something of the Proteus element, and a good deal of the Biron, we shall have a combination the characteristic of which is a light, clear, and mobile, yet flushing, blushing, and all-applicable nervousness. Among the three plays in question he parts the combination—in Romeo and Proteus as the names suggest, and in Biron letting us see himself almost expressly as the literary critic, looking round among his contemporaries and making mock of their false tastes and affectations. In *Midsummer Night's Dream*, so far as the grotesque of stage-humours is introduced, we have an additional touch from his own experience; but, in the main, in that play, as partly in *Love's Labour's Lost* itself, we have his dreamy ideality, his natural Spenserianism, his delight in sylvan phantasy and romance. In his *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, belonging to the same period, we have the cool artist, choosing two subjects by way of excuse, and working them out carefully in detail, as a painter does his studies. That also is another

view of Shakespeare at this time: as his Romeo-Proteus-Biron temperament did not prevent him from being the prudent man of business, so it did not prevent him from being the cool artist. For the rest, he was ready for any dramatic work—sheer farce, as in his *Comedy of Errors* and *Taming of the Shrew*, or recasts of tragedies of horror and adventure, as in *Titus Andronicus* and *Pericles*, but with a preference for subjects from English history.

In this last department he had made studies of four English Kings—three of them, John, Richard II, and Henry VI, weak or bad, and one, Richard III, bad but strong. In *Richard II* he had risen to his highest. Altogether, through this stage, we have Shakespeare at his lightest and least definite in moral mood. The view of the world is that of a place of abundant and varied present activity in which the young had the keenest interest, and love and pleasure were therefore the leading powers, but in which also there was much else to observe and satirise, while one could border this active present with ideal landscapes and

dreamy realms of faery, and undoubtedly in the past there had been great struggles and much good and bad.

There can be less mistake about the mood of the next stage, bringing Shakespeare from about 1596 or 1597 to about 1603, or from his thirty-second or thirty-third to his thirty-ninth year. We may call it the *Jaques-Hamlet mood*, or the mood of universal meditativeness and inquisitiveness, of dominant intellectuality, scepticism, passivity, and sense of mystery. The "melancholy Jaques" of *As You Like It.* with his incessant moralisings, his power of finding sadness in everything, and his constant quest of objects on which to exercise this power, is a kind of hint towards, a preparation for, the later and nobler Hamlet, with his grand soliloquisings, his abnormal consumption of himself in wonder and speculative musing, and his incapacity for immediate action, with that skull always in his hands. In both it is impossible not to feel that Shakespeare drew from himself; they, if no others, are constitutional characters, excerpts from his self-know-

ledge. It is memorable also that, according to all likelihood of dating, this Jaques-Hamlet period is the period of that extraordinary series of Shakespeare's sonnets, which breathes a similar mood throughout, and of which more anon.

Through the whole of this stage the world is a complex, inexplicable wonder, full of problems for meditation, with more of sorrow dashed through it than in the former stage, and with more of interest, if only painful interest, for those who have passed out of mere youth and its blooming enjoyments.

In relief, however, from this supposed personal mood of the author, we have the wondrous burst of his quite opposed objective creations in the same period, when his dramatic faculty was at its full mastery. For to this period belong his continued studies of English history in his *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, both able and strong Kings, but the last evidently Shakespeare's ideal of practical kingly greatness, of the man of real action; his revel in the humours of Falstaff in these plays; and six of his finest and most lightsome comedies

besides, two or three of them rich in conviviality and real fun.

Then we move on to the stage bringing us from *Hamlet* and the year 1603 to about the year 1609, or from Shakespeare's thirty-ninth year to his forty-fifth or forty-sixth, and including *Measure for Measure*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Julius Cæsar*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. What a change! All now high and tragic: the world no more a mere speculative wonder, but full of tremendous moral realities, and the passions, and fates, and phrenzies of full-grown and experienced men. Hypocrisy, Jealousy, Ambition, Ingratitude, Inconstancy, Political Assassination and Revolt, Voluptuousness in Empire—these are now the themes: ruptures in the great family relationships, and in the bonds of societies, alliances, and states. A kind of hurricane has blown through the Hamlet world, clearing it of its meditativeness, its passivity, its mere intellectuality and scepticism. With such hard knockings against facts, such jostlings of rocks and moral earth-

quakes, there is no leisure for idealistic theorising, or for doubting that, on whatever ultimate foundation things rest, the present manifestation of them is mightily real. It is observable, too, that through this stage the subjective vein does not expound itself in plays apart or in characters in such, but in the objective choice of a massive range of subjects, partly Roman. The constitutional in Shakespeare has incorporated itself with his objective in dramatic activity.

There succeeds a brief stage, however, in which the subjective again releases itself, or so starts out from the objective themes with which it is blended as to solicit separate notice. This may be called the *Coriolanus-Timon mood*, because its outcome is mainly in these two plays, written together about 1609–10. *Coriolanus* is one of the most tremendous of Shakespeare's plays, one in which, as has already been said, he is seen writing most absolutely for himself, cancelling nothing, suppressing nothing, permitting density and fulness of meaning even to contention, contemptuous

of the needs or capacities of stage-audiences or of ordinary readers. Now that enormous pride, that contempt, scorn, defiance, detestation of the *vulgus* of public opinion, which he embodies in the Roman patrician, and which is a different thing from any known form of mere aristocracy, seems to have been subjective or Shakespearian in so far as, *mutatis mutandis*, it may have come upon Shakespeare himself at some moments in his Stratford retirement. What a *canaille* the whole howling pack of them are, with their assemblies, their votings, their admirations, their acclamations! The mood seems even enlarged in *Timon of Athens*, where it ends in universal and exceptionless misanthropy, perception of selfishness and lust of gold everywhere, and disgust and loathing for the whole race of mankind.

> "I am sick of this false world, and will love nought
> But even the mere necessities upon 't.
> Then, Timon, presently prepare thy grave;
> Lie where the light foam of the sea may beat
> Thy grave-stone daily."

And he does lie there, and the last of the noble Timon we see is his tomb in the watery ocean

verge, washed daily by the flowing and ebbing tide, with the inscription he had himself carved upon it, to tell the chance visitor that might stray thither that here lay buried a nameless man who, while alive, had hated all the living.

Happily this is not the final mood. In *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest*, and *The Winter's Tale*, the last plays that Shakespeare wrote (except in so far as *Henry VIII* may be his), and bringing us to within three or four years of his death, we have a return to a milder mood, a contemplative faith and tolerance, a reconciliation with the world as a whole, a kindly interest in its concerns, and especially in the budding fates of the young. In *The Winter's Tale*, indeed, written with the same marvellous complexity and delight in abundance as the *Coriolanus*, something of continued sternness may be traced, but it disappears ere the end, like the clouds breaking away from the new effulgence of the sun. Perhaps, however, it is in *The Tempest* that this final mood of masterly and contemplative calmness and kindliness, as the last result of lifelong

experience, appears most beautifully. Little wonder that there has been so general a desire to account this play Shakespeare's *very* last. It is certainly nearly his last—and in a sense we may take it as his last. What is the magical Island in that play, somewhere in an unmapped sea, with its two human beings only, father and daughter, upon it, till there is the intrusion and commotion of the shipwrecked crew wandering over it; but with also its sprightly Ariel and its brutal Caliban, and all the visionary enchantments and aerial music thereto belonging,—what is this but Shakespeare's last symbolic representation of human life as a whole! There is the Island, full of sights and sounds, mystical, magical, beautiful, very real in a sense; but the waves ring it round on all sides, and the eternal war of the immeasurable sea! And what is Prospero, the lord of the Island, the wise and good magician who has found a refuge in it, has conquered it by his spells, and can rule all within it to his will? Shakespeare himself, we say at once; the mood of this play, and of those that were written about the same time, is the *Pros-*

pero mood. The Romeo-Proteus-Biron of the first period, the Jaques-Hamlet of the second, the sympathiser with all great and terrible action of the third, the man touched briefly with the Coriolanus and Timon spirit of the fourth, are now all included and wound up in the stately, thoughtful, fatherly, benevolent, still sad, but pious and serene Prospero. Passages in the play have even been construed as Shakespeare's identification of himself with Prospero, and his farewell to the stage and to the active world, some few years before his death, through Prospero's mouth, thus:

> " But this rough magic
> I here abjure; and, when I have required
> Some heavenly music,—which even now I do,—
> To work mine end upon their senses, that
> This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
> Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
> And deeper than did ever plummet sound
> I'll drown my book."

Again at the close of the play:

> " Sir, I invite your Highness and your train
> To my poor cell, where you shall take your rest
> For this one night; which, part of it, I'll waste
> With such discourse as, I not doubt, shall make it
> Go quick away: the story of my life,

And the particular accidents gone by
Since I came to this isle: and in the morn
I'll bring you to your ship, and so to Naples,
Where I have hope to see the nuptial
Of these our dear-beloved solemnized;
And thence retire me to my Milan, where
Every third thought shall be my grave."

Again, in the Epilogue, spoken by Prospero:

"Now I want
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;
And my ending is despair,
Unless I be relieved by prayer,
Which pierces so, that it assaults
Mercy itself, and frees all faults."

All said hitherto has related only to Shakespeare's conception of this world, a human system of things, within itself. We have seen the extreme vividness of his conception of nature and life, with his postulate of a demonic or supra-and-infra human element somehow interwoven with it; we have seen his ease and delight in flinging this vivid world back to any past point in its history, and treating it as so very much the same wherever we have cognisance of it that, though it takes many centuries to measure its

span, it is one thing really; we have seen also the substantial rectitude of his ethical interpretation of the world and desire for its rule; and we have seen that his interpretation of it and desires about it did not remain constant, but underwent changes from a lighter and less definite to a sterner and graver. These have, however, been but hints as to his notion of the relation of this world of Nature and human history as a whole to any underlying, originating, environing, and for-ever-persisting Reality. Now, all through his plays, lighter and graver, from first to last, what is to be found in Shakespeare on this subject is a latent or proclaimed sense of the phantasmagoric character, the evanescence, the non-solidity, the non-reality after all of everything that now exists, at least in the forms that seem so vivid and real to us. In all the more serious plays, historic or tragic, he contrives to convey the idea that what is going on with such hurry and tumult, such fulness of life, such vast human energy, melts away and disappears and rests on a flooring of evanescent beams. So with the historic world collectively; it is a vast spectacular something

within a film; the film may and will burst; how did the spectacle originate, and what will survive of it? I can compare the strength and constancy of this feeling in Shakespeare of the temporariness and necessary evanescence of the present system of things to nothing so fully as to an inheritance in his mind, more than in most others, of that old mythical cosmology of the Gothic race, as preserved in the Scandinavian Eddas. By it Mannheim and Asgarth, or the present middle world of men and demons, were regarded as transcendentally begirt by an infinitude of Muspelheim above and Nilfheim below, the great tree of life, Yggdrasil, shooting from the pit of Nilfheim up through the whole Cosmos of Mannheim and Asgarth, its top high in Muspelheim. On the fall of that tree from the long gnawing at its roots, this Cosmos would collapse and vanish in steam, and all existence be referred again to its boundless original. Here it is that I doubt the tenability of Ulrici's definition of Shakespeare as the most Christian of poets. His ethics within the real world may be Christian; his heart was

Christian; his aspirations and hopes as to an unknown may have been Christian; but his cosmology is too uncertain to be called strictly Christian, though perhaps, if passed through the alembic of idealistic metaphysics, it need not really differ. Whatever we might like to have been the case, it is the fact with which we are concerned. That, I believe, is as I have stated it. Among the many expressions of it is the famous passage in *Macbeth:*

"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

Macbeth, v. 5.

Or, if it should seem that this refers chiefly to the life of the individual (which, however, would involve all), take the still more famous passage in *The Tempest*, where Prospero announces that all the magical enchantments

of his Island are about to cease and its history to be wound up:

> "Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
> As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
> Are melted into air, into thin air:
> And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on; and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep."

Here it is Humanity itself, Nature and Life as a whole, the entire Cosmos and its history, that is declared to be a phantasmagory and ultimately evanescent. Prospero speaks at first of the visionary revel or life of his own magical Island, and then transfers the assertion to that world and life of Mankind of which his Island is a metaphor or symbol. Remembering that Prospero here was Shakespeare himself, and that the imaginary Island may also mean that world of poetic and dramatic creation in which Shakespeare had spent his life and to which he was bidding farewell, may we not now see a new significance in the well-known fact of

Shakespeare's extreme carelessness as to the fate of his productions? His creations, like the real world they mirrored and entertained, were as vivid and as elaborate as he could make them; his enjoyment, his excitement, in the act of producing them was intense; he spared no pains: but, when they had served their hour, why any farther care about them? If the vividness, the intense apparent solidity and reality, of the great cosmic creation itself, was but a phantasmagoric delusion, vacancy-sprung and again to lapse in evanescence, why should the intense vividness of one's own little creations, and one's joy and excitement in the act of producing and first contemplating them, infer any extraordinary interest in their perpetuation?

> "And deeper than did ever plummet sound
> I'll drown my book."

So much for what I called the most solid and thorough method of investigation of Shakespeare's mind through his own writings: viz. the study of his Plays and Poems individually for their meanings, and in their sequence and sum-total, for his philosophy, his inmost and

most characteristic moods, principles, and habits of thinking. In exhibiting this method it has been necessary now and then to quote detached passages expressing some of the meanings believed to pervade the plays, and thus to slightly anticipate yet another method of piercing to Shakespeare himself through his writings. This is the method of discerning him not only through the plots, actions, and meanings of his plays as wholes, but also through occasional or dispersed passages by themselves. The difficulty here arises from the dramatic character of Shakespeare's writings. His persons are innumerable, and of all varieties of goodness and badness, levity, or weight and stateliness: how shall we know in any case that a speech or a sentiment coming from the mouth of one of these persons may be taken as conveying an opinion, belief, or feeling appertaining to Shakespeare in his own name? Briefly, it may be submitted, by following a plan which may be followed in the case of all writers, dramatic or non-dramatic, and, indeed, of all persons whatsoever to whose speech or conversation we have anyhow access

on a sufficient scale. It is the plan of *observation of what we may call Recurrences and Fervours.*

By *recurrences* is meant what the word suggests—repetitions of any kind: repetitions of phrases; repetitions of peculiar verbal forms or figures; repetitions of allusions to particular things or classes of things; repetitions of quotations or historical anecdotes and instances; repetitions of ideas, maxims, sentiments. What recurs in a person's speech or writings, what he says more than once, and especially what he is apt to say again and again, is significant of what is stronger than usual, more fixed than usual, in his mind. "It has often come to my ears that it is a saying too frequently in your mouth that you have lived long enough for yourself," said Cicero, speaking in Cæsar's presence not long before Cæsar's death; and what a glimpse into Cæsar's mind, of his world-weariness towards the end of his great career, to know that, when his friends reasoned with him on his carelessness of his own life, his habit of going about freely with no precautions against assassination, this was the phrase that

always came to his lips: "I have lived long enough for myself"—that is, he had lived long enough so far as his own pleasure in living, or need of living, was concerned.

Even a person's favourite jests, anecdotes, quotations from poets or other books, or references to events or to eminent historical characters, have a similar significance. By observing such *recurrences*, therefore, in a person's conversation or in his writings, a good deal may be found out about his mind and mode of thinking and feeling.

Then there are what have here been called *fervours:* by which is meant utterances with a certain heat, enthusiasm, rousing and glow of the whole spirit, eloquence, passionate emotion. What moves a man strongly, agitates or disturbs him, so that he speaks earnestly, and especially what vehemently excites him, so that his utterance catches fire, is always a valuable revelation concerning him. The temperaments of people differ, so that many are habitually more cool and equable than others; but all do care more about some things than about things in ordinary, and all

have their fervours. To observe these, as well as the recurrences, is an excellent method for the study of character through writing or conversation: fervours, as well as recurrences, indicate fixed ideas, with the advantage that fervours indicate highly exciting ideas. The two are apt to pass into each other, recurrences into fervours, and fervours into recurrences: hence a passage in an author may be at once a fervour and a recurrence, and so be doubly significant. Still the two are distinguishable; and, though a fervour will generally be a recurrence, there may be many recurrences where there is no fervour, but only some light fantastic interest.

Are there *recurrences* in Shakespeare? Far fewer in the shape of mere repetitions of phraseology, mere recurring verbal patches or formulæ, than in most writers. He varies his language wonderfully, writing now as if he had no recollection of what he had previously written, or as if, in his extraordinary fluency, he had no occasion to fall back on his former orations and quote from himself. Still there *are* recurrences, even of this small verbal sort,

while recurrences of sentiments, ideas, and allusions are still more frequent. Let us take a few examples. Everyone remembers the clown's final song in *Twelfth Night*, beginning:

"When that I was and a little tiny boy,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
A foolish thing was but a toy,
For the rain it raineth every day."

Shakespeare must have been fond of this air and refrain, for he repeats it through the Fool in *King Lear:*

"He that has and a little tiny wit,—
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,—
Must make content with his fortunes fit,
For the rain it raineth every day."

In *Measure for Measure* Angelo says to Isabella:

"Be that you are,
That is, a woman; if you be more, you're none,"

and in *Macbeth* there is a variation of the phrase:

"I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none."

In *Hamlet* Horatio exclaims:

"O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!"

and in *King Lear* Goneril swears:

"By day and night he wrongs me."

In *Twelfth Night* Sir Andrew excuses his occasional stupidity by saying:

"I am a great eater of beef and I believe that does harm to my wit;"

and in *Troilus and Cressida* Thersites calls Ajax a "mongrel beef-witted lord." The phrase "bruised arms," which occurs in the opening speech of *Richard III*, occurs also in *Lucrece*. Black complexion in a woman, which is a very pointed theme in the *Sonnets*, is nearly as pointed a theme in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and is treated in nearly identical phraseology and word-play. In the inserted portion of a play in *Hamlet* there is a passage, in execration of the goddess Fortune, with this image:

"All you gods,
In general synod take away her power,
Break all the spokes and fellies from her wheel,
And bowl the round nave down the hill of heaven
As low as to the fiends!"

Farther on in *Hamlet* the image is resumed in a speech of Rosencrantz thus:

"The cease of majesty
Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw

What's near it with it: it is a massy wheel,
Fix'd on the summit of the highest mount,
To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
Are mortised and adjoin'd; which, when it falls,
Each small annexment, petty consequence,
Attends the boisterous ruin."

Affectation of foreign fashions in dress is satirised in *The Merchant of Venice* thus, in Portia's description of the young travelling Englishman:

"How oddly he is suited! I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behaviour everywhere."

In *Much Ado About Nothing* Benedict is flouted thus:

"There is no appearance of fancy in him, unless it be a fancy that he hath to strange disguises; as, to be a Dutchman to-day, a Frenchman to-morrow; or in the shape of two countries at once, as, a German from the waist downward, all slops, and a Spaniard from the hip upward, no doublet";

and both passages look like a recollection of one in Hall's *Satires*, which were then just out, and which Shakespeare may have read:

"But thou cans't mask in garish gaudery,
To suit a fool's far-fetched livery,—

A French head joined to neck Italian,
My thighs from Germany, and breast from Spain,
An Englishman in none, a fool in all."

Shakespeare seems to have disliked wigs and false hair. Here are three passages from him conveying that idea :

Dio. S. There's no time for a man to recover his hair that grows bald by nature.
Ant. S. May he not do it by fine and recovery?
Dio. S. Yes, to pay a fine for a periwig, and recover the lost hair of another man.
Ant. S. Why is Time such a niggard of hair?
Comedy of Errors.

"So are those crisped snaky golden locks
Which make such wanton gambols with the wind,
Upon supposed fairness, often known
To be the dowry of a second head,
The skull that bred them in the sepulchre."
Merchant of Venice.

"Days outworn,
When beauty lived and died as flowers do now,
Before these bastard signs of fair were born,
Or durst inhabit on a living brow;
Before the golden tresses of the dead,
The right of sepulchres, were shorn away,
To live a second life on second head."
Sonnet 68.

In the dialogue in *Hamlet*, between Hamlet and Polonius, we have:

Ham. Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?
Pol. By the mass, and 'tis like a camel, indeed.
Ham. Methinks it is like a weasel.
Pol. It is backed like a weasel.
Ham. Or like a whale?
Pol. Very like a whale.

And the fancy of seeing shapes in clouds comes back more seriously in *Antony and Cleopatra:*

Ant. Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish,
A vapour sometime like a bear or lion,
A tower'd citadel, a pendent rock,
A forked mountain, or blue promontory
With trees upon't, that nod unto the world.

The striking phrase in *All's Well that Ends Well*, describing an easy life of profligacy as "the flowery way that leads to the broad gate and the great fire," recurs in Ophelia's speech to her brother in *Hamlet*, where she warns him against "the primrose path of dalliance," and still more remarkably in *Macbeth*, where the Porter speaks of those "that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire."

"The skies were sorry,
And little stars shot from their fixed places,"

is a phrase in *Lucrece* anticipating the passage in *Midsummer Night's Dream:*

"And certain stars shot madly from their spheres."

"When I perhaps compounded am with clay"

is a phrase of the *Sonnets,*[1] and in *Hamlet,* in answer to the question what he has done with the dead body, the Prince says:

"Compounded it with dust, whereto 'tis kin."

In *Macbeth:*

"My way of life
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf"

is a repetition of an idea in Sonnet 73:

"That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon these boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang."

The famous image in Nestor's speech in *Troilus and Cressida:*

"In the reproof of chance
Lies the true proof of men: the sea being smooth,
How many shallow bauble boats dare sail

[1] Sonnet 71.

Upon her patient breast, making their way
With those of nobler bulk!
But let the ruffian Boreas once enrage
The gentle Thetis, and anon behold
The strong-ribb'd bark through liquid mountains cut,
Bounding between the two moist elements,
Like Perseus' horse: where's then the saucy boat,
Whose weak untimber'd sides but even now
Co-rivall'd greatness? either to harbour fled,
Or made a toast for Neptune,"

recurs, in briefer shape, in *Coriolanus:*

"You were used
To say extremity was the trier of spirits;
That common chances common men could bear;
That when the sea was calm all boats alike
Show'd mastership in floating."

And there had been the same image and phraseology, with a difference of idea, in Sonnet 80:

"But since your worth, wide as the ocean is,
The humble as the proudest sail doth bear,
My saucy bark inferior far to his
On your broad main doth wilfully appear."

The enumeration of the woes of life in Hamlet's soliloquy:

"The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,

The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,"

is a kind of echo of Sonnet 66, and recurs in *Timon of Athens:*

"Their griefs,
Their fears of hostile strokes, their aches, losses,
Their pangs of love, with other incident throes
That nature's fragile vessel doth sustain
In life's uncertain voyage."

In *Titus Andronicus* we have:

"She is a woman, therefore may be woo'd:
She is a woman, therefore may be won;"

in *Henry VI*, Part I, we have:

"She's beautiful and therefore to be woo'd;
She is a woman, therefore to be won,"

and, as in *Richard III*, which is undoubtedly all Shakespeare's, we have:

"Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?
Was ever woman in this humour won?"

and in the *Sonnets* (No. 41) the same cadence:

"Gentle thou art and therefore to be won,
Beauteous thou art, therefore to be assailed."

the recurrence seems to certify Shakespeare's hand, to some extent, in the earlier and doubtful plays.

"A lioness hath whelped in the streets;
And graves have yawn'd, and yielded up their dead;
Fierce fiery warriors fight upon the clouds,
In ranks and squadrons and right form of war,
Which drizzled blood upon the Capitol;
The noise of battle hurtled in the air,
Horses did neigh and dying men did groan,
And ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets."

Such is the enumeration in *Julius Cæsar* of the portents and prodigies at Rome preceding the great Cæsar's death; and in *Hamlet* there had been already (if *Hamlet* were the earlier) this reference to the same:

"In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
The graves stood tenantless, and the sheeted dead
Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets."

This last recurrence reminds one of a much broader and very significant recurrence, in which the same "mightiest Julius" is concerned, and which, I think, was first pointed out by the late Professor Craik in his edition

of *Julius Cæsar*, as part of a volume entitled *The English of Shakespeare*. It amounts to nothing less than this,—that there are more frequent allusions to Julius Cæsar in Shakespeare's plays than to any other known man of all past time, and that therefore we are justified in fancying that the great Roman was the man in the whole range of universal history that had most fascinated Shakespeare's imagination and that oftenest occurred to him in his musings. Not only have we the play of *Julius Cæsar* itself, in which he is the supreme hero, where it is all but clear that his assassination was regarded by Shakespeare as a huge blunder and political misdeed, and where he is pronounced, through the mouth of Antony:

> "The noblest man
> That ever lived in the tide of times";

not only in the subsequent play of *Antony and Cleopatra* does there remain a necessary recollection of him throughout, occasioning frequent mentions of him; but through the other plays, Comedies and Tragedies, as well as Histories where there was no especial need for bringing

in him or his name, the references to him, by way of illustration, comparison, or moral, are remarkably numerous. Mr. Craik quotes about twenty such, and they may not be all. Some are comic, as when Falstaff, in *Henry IV.* (Part II, iv. 3), presents himself with his prisoner Sir John Colevile to Prince John of Lancaster and others after the battle, and, when he is asked where he has been, and rebuked for not having appeared sooner, and having in fact, as usual, kept out of danger, thus gasconades about his extraordinary exertions in the fight:

"I never knew yet but rebuke and check was the reward of valour. Do you think me a swallow, an arrow, or a bullet? Have I, in my poor and old motion, the expedition of thought? I have speeded hither with the very extremest inch of possibility; I have foundered nine score and odd posts; and here, travel-tainted as I am, have, in my pure and immaculate valour, taken Sir John Colevile of the Dale, a most famous Knight and valorous enemy. But what of that? He saw me and yielded; that I may justly say, with the hook-nosed fellow of Rome, 'I came, saw, and overcame.'"

In several other of the passages this distinct reference to the hook-nosed physiognomy of the great Emperor and to his famous brag,

"*Veni, vidi, vici,*" is curiously repeated, as if the hook-nose and the brag were special forms of Shakespeare's recollection of Cæsar. But the high and serious allusions to Cæsar are as interesting:

"Great men oft die by vile bezonians:
A Roman sworder and banditto slave
Murder'd sweet Tully; Brutus' bastard hand
Stabb'd Julius Cæsar."

Henry VI, Part II.

"Imperious Cæsar, dead and turn'd to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away:
O, that that earth, which kept the world in awe,
Should patch a wall to expel the winter's flaw!"

Hamlet.

"Julius Cæsar, whose remembrance yet
Lives in men's eyes and will to ears and tongues
Be theme and hearing ever."

Cymbeline.

I will mention only one other of Shakespeare's recurrences; but it is perhaps the most frequent and characteristic of all. It is his habit of taking metaphors and comparisons from the stage and its business. Acting being Shakespeare's profession, and much of his London life being passed on the stage with the footlights shining on him, or behind the

scenes in what we now call the green-room during the performances of plays, and in the society of actors, little wonder that the scenery, humours, and paraphernalia of theatres were constant things in his imagination, introducing themselves directly or mataphorically into his thoughts of all matters whatsoever. Of his direct references to plays, players, and stage-business, we have already spoken, adducing more particularly as examples his bringing in of the players for the play within the play in *The Taming of the Shrew;* his ludicrous grotesque of the rustic performance before Theseus in *Midsummer Night's Dream;* and his insertion of a fragment of an inner play, and of so much talk about actors, theatres, and their interests, in *Hamlet.* These passages are worth reading for the insight they give into Shakespeare's thorough knowledge of the stage, his notions of its purpose and capabilities and of good and bad acting, and his valuation of his profession. In this last particular, he certainly does not err by over-estimation. His actors and players are never represented as more than poor fellows, doing

their best in a hard and somewhat vagrant profession, many of them abominably bad in their art, "robustious periwig-pated fellows" that it was a torture to see and hear, but others with the real genius of their craft, and pleasant, modest, and likeable. On the whole, there is a humorous kindliness in Shakespeare's treatment of his craft. Thus, in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, when Duke Theseus is offered the performance of the interlude of *Pyramus and Thisbe* by Quince, Snug, Bottom, Flute, Snout, and Starveling, he asks:

Thes. What are they that do play it?
Phil. Hard-handed men, that work in Athens here,
Which never labour'd in their minds till now;
And now have toil'd their unbreathed memories
With this same play, against your nuptial.
Thes. And we will hear it.
Phil. No, my noble lord;
It is not for you: I have heard it over,
And it is nothing, nothing in the world;
Unless you can find sport in their intents,
Extremely stretch'd and conn'd with cruel pain,
To do you service.
Thes. I will hear that play;
For never any thing can be amiss
When simpleness and duty tender it.

And when, at the acme of absurdity of the

play, Hippolyte exclaims, "This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard," what is the answer of the high-minded Duke?

"The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them."

It is less with these direct introductions of stage humours and machinery than with metaphors and modes of thinking derived from the stage that we are now concerned. These abound, and a complete collection of them would fill not a few pages. Here are several of them:

Antonio. I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano;
A stage, where every one must play a part,
And mine a sad one.

Merchant of Venice.

York. As in a theatre, the eyes of men
After a well-graced actor leaves the stage,
Are idly bent on him that enters next,
Thinking his prattle to be tedious;
Even so, or with much more contempt, men's eyes
Did scowl on gentle Richard.

Richard II.

"O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,

Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wann'd;
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit? and all for nothing!
For Hecuba!
What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? What would he do,
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
The very faculties of eyes and ears."

Hamlet.

Casca. How many ages hence
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over
In states unborn and accents yet unknown!

Julius Cæsar.

Ulysses. Sometime, great Agamemnon,
Thy topless deputation he puts on,
And, like a strutting player, whose conceit
Lies in his hamstring, and doth think it rich
To hear the wooden dialogue and sound
Twixt his stretched footing, and the scaffoldage,
Such to-be-pitied and o'er-enacted seeming
He acts thy greatness in.

Trolius and Cressida.

The explicit comparison of the world as a whole to a stage, and to human life as action

thereon, contained in the first of these quotations, reappears more emphatically in others. Thus in the famous passage in *As You Like It:*

Duke S. Thou see'st we are not all alone unhappy:
This wide and universal theatre
Presents more woeful pageants than the scene
Wherein we play in.

Jaques. All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like a furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon

With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank ; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans every thing.

The same, more fiercely, in the passage already quoted from *Macbeth:*

" Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

This *recurrence*, as you will see from the last examples, is very apt, in Shakespeare, to pass into a *fervour;* and naturally, as I have said, many of Shakespeare's recurrences are also fervours. But one might make a quest of the fervours as such. Nor would it be a difficult one. No other writer in any language furnishes so many of those verbal beauties, splendours, or magnificent bursts of expression, which suit for books of poetical extracts, and for perpetual reading, quotation, or recitation.

Shakespeare's beauties and splendours, indeed, are so incessant in his pages, and correspond so fully, in their variety, with the whole range of known human feelings and of possible or imaginable situations in human life, that to try to represent him by any mere selection of his fine passages is felt to be absurd. He is the king of universal expression. Not unfrequently, however, apart from the beauty or splendour of some of his great passages, and from the artistic delight, the pleasurable glow and excitement, one can see that he must have felt in writing them, one detects what I call more peculiarly a fervour—namely, a glow of the heart, a personal agitation or deep nervous thrill, in connexion with the thought he is expressing, a tremor of the whole being because some constitutional topic has been reached. This may be discerned in John of Gaunt's famous apostrophe to England in *Richard II*, in which it is not difficult to see Shakespeare's own patriotic enthusiasm and exultation in the greatness of his country. In short, every now and then, in reading Shakespeare, one comes across a passage with so

much heat in it, as distinct from light, splendour, or weight, that one feels that it is a passage of constitutional emotion, in which Shakespeare's own heart breaks through the dramatic trammels and speaks for itself.

An example in which there is no possibility of doubt is that speech of Prospero's in *The Tempest* which has been quoted on another account as perhaps, all in all, the most characteristic passage ever written by Shakespeare, inasmuch as it expresses so wonderfully his deepest constitutional feeling, his sense of the merely phantasmagoric character and inevitable evanescence of all that now so bravely exists. Prospero has bestowed his daughter Miranda on her lover Ferdinand, and to signalise their betrothal he has called up an aerial vision or magical masque, performed by spirits, he and the young couple being the sole spectators. It is, as Ferdinand says, "a most majestic vision, and harmonious charmingly." First Iris enters and speaks, then Ceres enters and speaks, and lastly Juno, who first speaks and then sings with her sister-goddess Ceres;

after which there is more dialogue among the three goddesses, interrupted by the inburst of a bevy of Nymphs or Naiads. Then there is a second inburst of sunburnt sickle-men or reapers, as if in harvest-time; and the nymphs and the reapers join in a graceful dance. The dance is still going on when "Prospero starts suddenly, and speaks; after which, to a strange, hollow, and confused noise," the dancing figures "heavily vanish." The reason is explained by what Prospero mutters to himself:

> "I had forgot that foul conspiracy
> Of the beast Caliban and his confederates
> Against my life: the minute of their plot
> Is almost come."

He then says to the spirits, "Well done! avoid; no more!" and the last wreck of the aerial pageant disappears, and Prospero, Ferdinand, and Miranda are left by themselves. Ferdinand and Miranda, looking at Prospero, who stands apart with something important in his mind, exchange words thus:

> *Ferd.* This is strange: your father's in some passion
> That works him strongly.
> *Mir.* Never till this day
> Saw I him touch'd with anger so distemper'd.

Prospero, who has hardly heard them, then turns round, and perceiving alarm on Ferdinand's face, thus addresses him:

> "You do look, my son, in a moved sort,
> As if you were dismay'd: be cheerful, sir.
> Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
> As I foretold you, are all spirits, and
> Are melted into air, into thin air:
> And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on; and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep."

Here, I say, Shakespeare expresses, and in a form for ever, what we have found to be his inmost and deepest constitutional idea. This so solid Universe is but a painted phantasmagory vacuity-sprung and that will melt into vacuity; the life of man and of all humanity is but as a dream, most vivid within itself, but having its being, basis, and environment or cushioning in what we may call a sleep. Well, but this idea having been expressed, and expressed so matchlessly, does the passage

end? No, there are five more lines, in which Prospero apologises to Ferdinand thus:

> "Sir, I am vex'd;
> Bear with my weakness; my old brain is troubled:
> Be not disturb'd with my infirmity:
> If you be pleased, retire into my cell,
> And there repose: a turn or two I'll walk
> To still my beating mind."

What is this but a positive intimation by Shakespeare himself that the passage he had just written was one of his fervours? It was evidently not the angry thought of Caliban and his conspiracy that had put Prospero into his final perturbation: it was that thought of the ultimate evanescence of everything which had so suddenly seized him and to which he had been giving utterance. The utterance had moved him excessively; his mind was beating; he must walk to and fro a little in the open air to recover himself.

None can read that passage without seeing that Shakespeare likewise, when he had written it, was overcome with agitation, and rose to pace his chamber and so still his beating mind.

CHAPTER VI

THE SONNETS

THERE is yet another mode of investigating Shakespeare through his writings. What if there were any portion of them that can be taken as autobiographic? *Is* there any such portion? There is.

The main mass of his writings consists of his dramas, the baffling non-personality of which compels us to such methods of investigation as have been suggested, and, with whatever success in some main results, yet leaves us unsatisfied. His two descriptive and narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, are cool objective studies of selected themes, or seem such at first sight, and have much of the dramatic in them. His few graceful lyrics and momentary fancies, published apart in *The Passionate Pilgrim*, convey a fine general effect, but a rather impalpable one. As has been pointed out, Shakespeare differs

from almost all other poets in not having left us any body of those miscellanous epigrams, epistles, and verses of occasion which help us to see poets in their actual moods and surroundings. But there is the mysterious collection of his *Sonnets*—the Sonnets specially so-called—*i.e.* the 152 Sonnets that evidently form a connected whole or series. These are a treasure, however far they may be at the same time a mystery. They are not sonnets after the strict Italian structure, now taken as the true model of the sonnet, and exemplified in its chief varieties in Milton's sonnets and in those of most subsequent English sonnet-writers, but are after a fashion of sonnet more native and English, and common among Shakespeare's contemporaries, *i.e.* consisting of fourteen lines of 5 *xa* (occasionally 5 *xa*+), the first twelve lines being made up of three successive and independent elegiac stanzas of two rhymes each (A 1, 3, B 2, 4), while the thirteenth and fourteenth lines are an added rhyming couplet. One or two deviate even from this lax model, and are not sonnets at all in any sense now recognised.

The neglect of Shakespeare's Sonnets through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Shakespeare-worship over his Dramas was rising or had risen to its height, is one of the marvels of literary history. More marvellous still was the feeling about them by those commentators on Shakespeare who did chance to look into them. Actually it is on record that Steevens, one of the chief editors of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century, declared of the Sonnets that an Act of Parliament would not be strong enough to compel people to read them. Coleridge, about the beginning of the nineteenth century, rebuked this "flippant insensibility," as Wordsworth called it; and Coleridge and Wordsworth seem to have been among the first persons in England to have any real knowledge of the Sonnets and adequate appreciation of them. Even after that, however, such a critic as Hazlitt could say that he could "make neither head nor tail of their ultimate drift," and not till about the 'Thirties does there seem to have been any systematic attempt to elucidate them. Apart from some anonymous magazine article, the

first express commentaries on them, or examination of them, known to me are in a volume by Mr. James Boaden, published in 1837, and another by Mr. Charles Armitage Brown, a friend of Keats, published in 1838.[1] Since then, however, the run upon the Sonnets, both in this country and in Germany, has been quite extraordinary; and there are now printed books on them, or concerning them, in English and in German, which would fill a shelf.

All now agree that the Sonnets are a collection of almost matchless interest, a legacy from Shakespeare at once strange and precious, —nothing less, in fact, than a preserved series of metrical condensations, weighty and compact as so many gold nuggets, of thoughts and feelings that were once in his mind. The interpretations of them collectively, however, the theories of their nature and purport collectively, differ widely. The earliest theory, and that which has the largest and strongest

[1] Eight years later, in 1846, David Masson began in Edinburgh his own lifelong study of Shakespeare by devoting some months to what he afterwards called "a fond juvenile study" of the *Sonnets*, and writing a commentary. This commentary was read at the time by Carlyle, and is annotated by him.—R. M.

support (adopted as it was by Coleridge and Wordsworth, followed by Hallam, Boaden, Brown, Ulrici, Gewinus, and others), is that they are strictly autobiographical, and tell a story of Shakespeare's London life through a certain number of years—a curious story of a remarkable private friendship of his with a certain young man of high rank, called merely "Mr. W. H." in the dedication of the Sonnets when they were published in 1609; which friendship was complicated by a love-intrigue, and by the presence on the scene of another rival poet. Another theory is that a good many of the Sonnets are autobiographical, but that others, of a non-personal nature, are jumbled with those. A third theory, or a variation of the last, is that, while some of the Sonnets are autobiographical, or written in Shakespeare's own name, a good many of them are *vicarious*, or written by him for other people—notably for the Earl of Southampton and the Earl of Pembroke on occasions when they wanted the use of Shakespeare's pen. A fifth theory is that they are wholly fantastic and imaginary, a novel of friendship and love

sketched out by Shakespeare and told imperfectly and in a shadowy manner in lyrics supposed to be spoken by the fancied persons; and a sixth is that they are a mystic or Platonic allegory, in which Shakespeare is really present, but, as it were, far back, and hid in symbolisms and hyperboles of his own contriving. Observe that all the theories, except the fifth, allow an autobiographical significance in the Sonnets, though they differ as to its amount, and as to the mode in which it is involved and has to be evolved. I may say at once that I adhere to that theory which makes them expressly and thoroughly autobiographical, and see no other theory that will stand real investigation. Wordsworth's testimony to this effect is worth that of a score of those more prosaic critics who, true to the instinct of the prosaic nature, will always send their wits to the ends of the earth rather than abide on a plain basis of fact. In the Sonnets "Shakespeare expresses his own feelings in his own person," said Wordsworth emphatically; and he added: "In no part of the writings of this Poet is found, in an equal compass, a greater

number of exquisite feelings felicitously expressed."

For the comprehension of the story of the Sonnets, it is best, I believe, to regard them as consisting of eight papers of Sonnets, really connected, but written at intervals over a series of years (from 1596 or 1597 to about 1603 is the most feasible range), these papers not indicated by breaks at the proper points when they were printed, but, with that omission, arranged there exactly in their right order, save that the last twenty-six (Sonnets 127-152) ought to be intercalated bodily between Sonnets 32 and 33. That is my own conclusion; but it is by no means necessary that it should be adopted in order to confirm the validity of the inferences from the Sonnets generally which I am about to draw. On any theory which accepts the Sonnets as autobiographical (and to that extent the agreement is sufficient), the inferences, I believe, will hold.

The first and most general impression received from a perusal of the Sonnets is that the writer must have been a man of peculiarly keen sensitiveness. It upsets the notion, so

common, that Shakespeare was a calm, imperturbable, self-possessed man, looking out on nature and life either with stony fixedness of observation, or with perpetual and invariable joyousness of mood. This notion, favoured by much that has been written about him, is intrinsically absurd. A man can lay hold of what lies round him only by his own being; and the boundlessness of Shakespeare's interest in things, and the shivering intensity with which he pierces into them on all sides, understanding them and translating them to the very heart, presupposes a coequal compositeness and exquisiteness of his own nerve, a coequal subtlety and intensity in his own mental experience. The image of "a mirror" fails here, if it suggests that the mind reflecting nature and life as Shakespeare's reflected them was itself a mere cold, polished, glass plate, that could be turned in one direction or another; the "mirroring" here involves, though the figure may snap as we say so, a vital relatedness of the mirroring agency to the things mirrored; or, in other words, and without figure, for power of poetic insight and repre-

sentation so enormous as Shakespeare's, his own mind must have been a correspondingly complex texture of individually fine nerve-fibres. This, which might be argued on grounds of theory, is confirmed in fact by the Sonnets. Nothing in our literature of about equal compass, unless it be Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, which is the likest thing we have to these Sonnets, presents such a combination of reflective thought with keen and varied emotion. A gentle, pensive melancholy is discernible in the very beginning; but this is ruffled and troubled, sometimes by mere brooding in itself, sometimes by the merest external trifle, so that the mood sinks into deep sorrow, self-dissatisfaction, despondent abjection, or rises into tumultuous outcry and complaint. Take Sonnets 29 and 30 as a first specimen:

"When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd.
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;

Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sing hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my fate with kings.

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste:
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,
And weep afresh love's long since cancell'd woe,
And moan the expense of many a vanish'd sight:
Then can I grieve at grievances forgone,
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er
The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,
Which I new pay as if not paid before.
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored and sorrows end."

Is this Shakespeare? and, if so, how do we see him? Certainly not in his joyous or convivial mood, as in his wit-combats at the "Mermaid" or elsewhere—though that he was capable of that mood too, and was often in it, we have abundant proof—but in one of the moods of his solitary and constitutional musing. Then, in some old London room

where we see him sitting alone, what is his reverie? It is one of sadness, even to "weeping" if we take him literally—of discontent with himself and his fortunes. Even with what he most enjoys, which we may take to be surely his own dramas and poetic creations, he is contented least; he looks about him and compares himself with other people, envying them this and that, and almost wishing that he were any one of them rather than himself—desiring, he says, "this man's art and that man's scope" (think of Shakespeare confessing *that!*); nay actually wishing that he were "featured like *him*,"—that he had some other man's countenance and visage. This last curious trait, it may be remembered, is attributed to his own "melancholy Jaques" in *As You Like It*, of whom Rosalind says that he is "out of love with his nativity and almost chides God for making him of that countenance that he is." And then in the next Sonnet still the same melancholy, only in the form of a retrospection of his life, a recollection of all the sad incidents in it, of the faces he once knew that are now vanished for ever, of the friends

that are dead and gone. Clearly not now, at all events, is Shakespeare in his firm, calm, joyous, or self-possessed state of temper: on the contrary, he is discomposed, dispirited, abject, and tremulously sensitive.

Take one of the Sonnets in which it is less of himself and of his own condition than of the state of society round about him that Shakespeare is thinking. It is Sonnet 66:

> "Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,
> As, to behold desert a beggar born,
> And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity,
> And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
> And gilded honour shamefully misplaced,
> And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
> And right perfection wrongfully disgraced,
> And strength by limping sway disabled,
> And art made tongue-tied by authority,
> And folly doctor-like controlling skill,
> And simple truth miscalled simplicity
> And captive good attending captain ill:
> Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,
> Save that, to die, I leave my love alone."

We have spoken of Shakespeare's Elizabethanism or Conservatism in politics, his acquiescence in the main with things as they had been established by law and custom; but

there are wonderful contrary touches. This surely is one of them. Society, we see, did not seem to Shakespeare all right, but in many things sadly out of joint. His selection of the forms of social wrong that shock him most is very remarkable, and not least his pointed reference to those that came most home to himself in his capacity of thinker, writer, and dramatist:

> "And art made tongue-tied by authority,
> And folly doctor-like controlling skill."

In Sonnets 110 and 111 Shakespeare's self-disgust, or rather disgust with the annoyances and abasements to which his profession in these days doomed him, is expressed in a manner that has become notorious:

> "Alas, 'tis true I have gone here and there
> And made myself a motley to the view,
> Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,
> Made old offences of affections new;
> Most true it is that I have look'd on truth
> Askance and strangely."

And again:

> "O, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
> The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,

That did not better for my life provide
Than public means which public manners breeds.
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand."

Some of the phrases here are worth dwelling on. That he had "gone here and there and made himself a motley to the view" can mean only that he has gone over the country as a stage-player, performing all kinds of parts; but what is meant by his having "sold cheap what is most dear" and by his having "made old offences of affections new"? The meaning, I believe, is that, as a writer of dramas, he had often put his own heart's blood, the dear-bought results of his own experience, into them, disguising in the shape of stories planted in the past and enacted by imaginary persons ("old offences") what was really recent or present personal feelings ("affections new"). This is an interesting confession, verifying what might have been concluded from the nature of the case, as implied in the connexion between the poet's experience and his imaginations, and curiously equivalent to Goethe's

more distinct statement about himself, that his impulse to write all through his life had been nothing else than his tendency, formed very early, always "to turn into an image, into a poem, everything that delighted or troubled or otherwise occupied himself," and so that all his writings in their series consisted of fragments of a great self-revelation. In Shakespeare's case the revelation is more deeply buried, but it is there. What seemed most painful to him, in this process of turning his own thoughts and dearest feelings into fictitious tales in which they might be lost and concealed, was that these had been for public amusement, and that so, in looking on, he had had to glance at the real truth wrapped up in them in the sidelong and indifferent manner of a perfect stranger. From his dramatic creations, however, he reverts to the mere outward circumstances of the actor's profession. The fact that "a brand" of disrespectability was attached to it, that the English law then classed players with vagabonds, was hard enough; but harder still the thought that, by working in the stuff of this profession and steeping himself, as he was

obliged to do, in the Bohemianism of his day, his own nature, like the hand of the dyer paddling in his dye-tubs, might be taking on the colour of his element.

So much by way of general impression from the Sonnets as to Shakespeare's constitution, his frequent, or at all events occasional, disposition to melancholy. But we may reach something more precise yet. By an application to the Sonnets by themselves of that method of the observation of recurrences and fervours which I illustrated generally for all his writings, we shall easily become aware of certain topics of meditation, certain trains of ideas, that were habitual with Shakespeare. Let us take a handful of passages culled from the series:

"When I consider everything that grows
Holds in perfection but a little moment,
That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows
Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;
When I perceive that men as plants increase,
Cheered and check'd even by the self-same sky,
Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,
And wear their brave state out of memory:
Then the conceit of this inconstant stay
Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,

Where wasteful Time debateth with Decay
To change your youth of day to sullied night."

Sonnet 15.

" Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,
And make the earth devour her own sweet brood;
Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws,
And burn the long-lived phœnix in her blood;
Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleets,
And do whate'er thou wilt, swift-footed Time."

Sonnet 19.

" If thou survive my well-contented day
When that churl Death my bones with dust shall cover."

Sonnet 32.

" Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end;
Each changing place with that which goes before,
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.
Nativity, once in the main of light,
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
And Time that gave doth now his gift confound.
Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow,
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow."

Sonnet 60.

" When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced
The rich proud cost of outworn buried age;

When sometime lofty towers I see down-razed,
And brass eternal slave to mortal rage."

Sonnet 64.

"No longer mourn for me when I am dead
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell."

Sonnet 71.

"Thy glass wilt show thee how thy beauties wear,
Thy dial how thy precious minutes waste;
The vacant leaves thy mind's imprint will bear,
And of this book this learning mayst thou taste.
The wrinkles which thy glass will truly show
Of mouthed graves wilt give thee memory;
Thou by thy dial's shady stealth mayst know
Time's thievish progress to eternity."

Sonnet 77.

"Or shall I live your epitaph to make,
Or you survive when I in earth am rotten."

Sonnet 81.

"No, Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change:
Thy pyramids built up with newer might
To me are nothing novel, nothing strange;
They are but dressings of a former sight.
Our dates are brief, and therefore we admire
What thou dost foist upon us that is old."

Sonnet 123.

What have we here, and in many other scattered lines and passages in the Sonnets

which I have refrained from quoting? What but that fixed or ever-recurring idea of Death, Change, Mortality, Time, the merely phantasmagoric character of all that now is and glitters so bravely as our mundane round of things, the fated march of all towards extinction and evanescence, that idea which we averred might be chased through all Shakespeare's plays, and to which he gave such marvellous utterance in that burst of Prospero's in *The Tempest:*

> "And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on; and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep."

Here, it is now manifest, we have Shakespeare in his deepest mood of constitutional musing, that mood to which he for ever gravitated when alone, and from which all his activity, all his miscellaneous commerce with the world, and observation and enjoyment of what went on its "huge stage," were but

rousings or rebounds. It seems worth while now, therefore, to consider this mood a little more particularly, and to give it a name.

Let it be called the *metaphysical mood.* As applied to Shakespeare, the name may, at first, stagger one. What! Shakespeare, the most concrete of poets, the myriad-minded painter of nature, of life, of actuality and possibility, the universal humorist who gave us Falstaff, Sir Toby Belch, and the rest, and threw more of rich fun and laughter in among mankind than Aristophanes and Rabelais put together: couple the word "metaphysical" with *him!* The criticism would arise from associations with the word "metaphysical" consequent on the wretched misuse of it for many a day. Popularly, "metaphysics" means anything very abstract and abstruse, anything hard and dry, especially if it be in the nature of scholastic reasoning about the human mind; to become "metaphysical" in talk is to leave plain, ordinary sense, and to go into hard and obscure notions where it is difficult to follow you and understand your meaning, and doubtful whether you have one. "Meta-

physics," in this sense, is any very abstract jargon about anything whatsoever, but especially about the human mind. But that is not what the word meant originally, and ought still to mean. It is a beautiful Greek compound, meaning, etymologically, τὰ μετ ὰ τὰ φυσικὰ, the things behind the physical, a beginning where the physical ends, and the considerations thereto appertaining. It is the Greek equivalent, or all but equivalent, of the commoner Latin word *supernatural;* and in this sense Shakespeare himself uses it:

> "The golden round
> Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
> To have thee crown'd withal."
>
> *Macbeth*, i. 5.

The metaphysical mood or tendency, in this simple and beautiful sense, is therefore that habit of mind which dwells with fondness and fascination on those ideas which are ultimate to all Humanity as such, which are the last thoughts that Humanity can think about itself, and which it must always think when it imagines itself as a whole. It is the mood

which embraces the totality of things physical, and sees this totality floating in a vast, unknown sea of the metaphysical or supernatural, ringing it round mysteriously, inscrutably, everlastingly. It is the tendency, strong in some minds in their solitary hours, to walk meditatively round the very boundary of all the world of knowledge, visibility, and experience, and to indulge in the ever-baffled contemplation and wonder of what may be surrounding and enclosing it. Suppose a city at night, a city begirt by a wall, inside the parapet of which wall there is a stone-flagged walk, pedestrians on which walk can see over the parapet. By far the greatest number of the citizens are busy within the city, in its lighted streets, or in their houses, prolonging their labours of the day into the night, or enjoying themselves convivially and domestically. This is the mass of mankind. But some citizens there are that you may conceive as peculiarly constituted. *Their* delight it is to get away from the luminous bustle of the city within, and to indulge in solitude in the nocturnal walk round the walls of the city,

their feet on the narrow stony path close to the parapet, but their eyes drawn by a strange fascination to the dark country encircling the city, stretching away in leagues of mysterious ghastliness, made only more ghastly by the sounds of windy moanings among the woodlands and by the twinkling of distant lights. This is what I call walking round the boundary of things. And suppose the city to be that city of life to which we all belong as human beings. This city has *its* walls, its little stony walk within the embrasured parapet. There are certain ultimate conceptions of and about the totality of things, the Earth and all the spangled astronomy in which it hangs, on which, as on a pavement, we obtain our last contemplative footing, and beyond which we but gaze into an unimaginable Infinitude. The majority of men refrain from the gaze, or venture on it but seldom. They are busy within the city at their crafts and enjoyments: the walk round the walls is not in their way. But some there are with whom this walk is frequent or habitual. They cannot refrain from it. As active as any others, it may be,

in their duties and enjoyments within the city, they tend always, when they are left to themselves, to that pavement of ultimate, repeated, unending meditation, which edges the embrasured parapet, to the simple but all-powerful thought of nature as a something not absolute and complete in itself, but only a little luminous disc bounded by a grander supernatural.

Now this habit or tendency of thought, this secret reference at all times to the supernatural, is, I believe, in one form or another, a constituent of all that we call *genius*. It is indeed the specifically and essentially *human* habit of thought: for, if all Humanity were rolled into one soul, of what else could that soul think, or against what could it press, but that which was beyond itself and out of itself? This is the sense in which I detect in Shakespeare an inordinate activity and prevalence of the *metaphysical mood*.

It may help to break the phrase into more definite and particular implications if we remember what *are* the extreme forms or conceptions of human sense, those that so verge on the metaphysical and melt away into it that

they seem to belong to it or to anchor us in it. What are these? Space and Time!

Whether these are, as some hold, only the purest and most abstract generalisations from sense-experience, or whether they are, as others have taught, necessary and structural forms of the human sentiency itself *a priori*, does not matter here. Equally in either view the double feeling of Space and Time is that on which we are carried or wafted in all our sensuous imaginings from the Finite to the bewildering Infinite; the two feelings are in a manner diverse and separable, and we may be wafted the great voyage on either; and those minds in which one or other, or both, are strongest, most intense, and most continuous, are the most powerfully human. Yes, the power of dilating the consciousness into the largest possible sphere of imagined astronomical space, and still feeling this sphere to be poised as but a round drop in a boundlessness beyond, and the conclative power of projecting the thought forward from the assumed first instant of time on through the intermediate roar of history and all the traffic and

mutation of things physical to an imaginary goal where all seems to end, and yet of feeling all the while that there is no end and no beginning, and that Time at its utmost stretch is but a beat or pulse of one Eternity: these are the two potencies of the human spirit that anchor us through sense itself in the sense-transcending and supernatural, and that we think of as genius.

If I were to make a distinction between Milton and Shakespeare derived from any such highly speculative suggestion, I would say that the Space-feeling was stronger in Milton, and the Time-feeling stronger in Shakespeare. In Milton the power of Space-imagination is enormous; no soul ever dilated itself through so vast a sphere in radius from this Earth, and fitted it with gleaming existence and imagined being and action; and, though there is a distinct enough course of time at the centre of this sphere where Humanity is situated, the rate of time diminishes for the rest till it vanishes and becomes nothing in the real Universe or Empyrean, so that at Milton's own far-on moment in the

history of man the Angels and Archangels that sang the first song of creation had hardly ceased their singing, and one and the same day in their lives and in Heaven's measure had included all the spectacle really, despite its seeming midpoint whirl of some thousands of years. In Milton's *Paradise Lost* time is sacrificed to space, that reality may be painted in virtually constant and present expanse. In Shakespeare, on the other hand, time—time—is the ruling feeling, the habitual or recurring form of the metaphysical musing and wonder. At or near the centre the Space-feeling is vivid enough:

"The acts commenced on this ball of earth."
Henry IV, Part II, Induction.

"Smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world!"
King Lear, iii. 2.

"Making a complement of proud compare
With sun and moon, with earth and sea's rich gems,
With April's first-born flowers, and all things rare
That heaven's air in this huge rondure hems."
Sonnet 21.

or in the well-known passage in *The Merchant of Venice:*

"Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:

There's not the smallest orb that thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins."

All the beauty of blue and starry space, and to a sufficient distance; but, on the whole, with rather an economy of outgoing in that form of wonder, and a habit (as I have noted in my readings) of taking the orbit of the moon as the proper and usual boundary of the world of human interests. That—with the sun, the higher planets, and the stars as outer luminaries—is the general extent of Shakespeare's physical "rondure," and it is not by expanding or bursting this "rondure" that he seeks the metaphysical. That is done rather by the intensity of his Time-feeling as beating through the duration of man's historic world, amazed at the mystery of its own pulsation, and baffled at the beginning and at the end. A great while ago this world began, how or why man's mere reason knows not; ever since there has been the tick-tick of a great clock; at each tick there was a conjuncture of things mightily real within the world for the moment of that tick; but from moment to moment the conjuncture

changed, some things that did exist dying and disappearing, and other things being born that were not; the moments pass into minutes, the minutes into hours, the hours into days, the days into years, the years into centuries, still with the same phenomenon of Death and Birth, of Persistence and Oneness through mutability and variety: whither does all drift, and what is to be the end of it? At that future end, too, reason is stopped, and the only answer can be that, real as it seems, most curious and interesting as it is, it is all phantasmagoric and phenomenal. The tick-tick, slow and deliberate, the death and burial, the birth of fresh energy to subsist for awhile and then pass into the same gaping maw of advancing Time, the cessation of this advance at last when nothing remains to be devoured, and Time merges into Eternity: that, save for supernatural teaching and faith in it, is all that we can fancy or aver. The passages quoted from the Sonnets are full of this feeling, and express it with even pain. Time, it will have been observed, has been personified in them. He is Time the Devourer, the Lord of this world, but also its ruthless

ruiner, abrading its hardest material, tumbling down its noblest monuments, and living among the dust and wrecks. So Death, his brother or agent, is also personified as a hideous, pitiless, untaught monster. He is "that churl Death." He is the sexton at his ease in graveyards and amid upturned boards of coffins.

Much has been made of certain passages in the Sonnets in which, rather to the contrary of what we have been saying, Shakespeare is supposed to predict the immortality of his own poetic work. Thus:

"Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme;
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone besmear'd with sluttish time.
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory.
'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity
Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room
Even in the eyes of all posterity
That wear this world out to the ending doom."

Sonnet 55.

and again:

"Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read,

And tongues to be your being shall rehearse
When all the breathers of this world are dead;
You still shall live—such virtue hath my pen—
Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men."

Sonnet 81.

Even were the ordinary interpretation of such passages correct, however, it would not make against the main proposition. It would only prove Shakespeare's consciousness that one of the most lasting things within this evanescent world would be the recollection of him and his genius—which recollection too would vanish sooner or later in nothingness with all the rest. But such a mode of thinking of himself or speaking of himself is so unlike Shakespeare, and is so much in contradiction with other passages of the Sonnets, that we may be sure there is some error in the interpretation.

"O, if, I say, you look upon this verse
When I perhaps compounded am with clay,
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse."

Sonnet 71.

These lines do not indicate any special certainty of posthumous fame or desire for it;

and in the very context of the passages where Shakespeare is supposed to predict his immortality, we have such phrases as "my rude ignorance," "my slight muse," "my barren rhyme," "these poor rude lines" applied to himself and to the very poems on which his supposed immortality was to depend, while there are even startling depreciations of himself in comparison with other poets, styled "better spirits," "happier men," and the like. What then is the explanation? It is that the true meaning of the passages believed to be exulting prophecies by Shakespeare of his future celebrity has been totally missed by the critics. Shakespeare, it will be found, is there repeating and working out a very subtle conceit connected with his inordinate feeling of Time's ruthless destructiveness. It is that the only antagonist of Time within this world, the only power that can foil him, outwit him, and perpetuate through the whole range of his earthly lordship what he would himself destroy at the instant of its nominal decease, is Literature, Verse, the art of Poetic Commemoration. This *is* a power against Time,

and all that Shakespeare means to say is that in these Sonnets *he* is using it so as to spite Time. It is not the enduring quality of his own verse in particular that he is exulting in; it is that, however poor its worth, yet, as being verse, little pieces of matter in fourteen lines set down in literary black and white, it belongs to that only great agency which can so far defy Time, and it will partake of the virtue of that agency. When he says:

> "Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
> Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme,"

it is of the inherent powerfulness of Rhyme or Literature as such that he is thinking, its power to pierce and split through Time and keep long alive the memory of the nominally dead, and not any specially piercing power possessed by his own verses. This may be verified by a study of the passages in their connexion. Here is one:

> "O, how shall summer's honey breath hold out,
> Against the wreckful siege of battering days,
> When rocks impregnable are not so stout,

Nor gates of steel so strong, but Time decays?
O fearful meditation! where, alack,
Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
O, none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright."

Sonnet 65.

With the clue in hand which has been obtained from the Sonnets, we can now return among the Poems and Plays generally, with the certainty that, as steel filings will spring to a magnet, many passages there will assume a new significance when brought in contact with this idea of the profoundly metaphysical tendency of Shakespeare's genius. Not only are there minute transferences from the Sonnets into the Poems and Plays in greater number than there are transferences among the Poems and Plays themselves, as if the Sonnets were a secret store of essences on which Shakespeare allowed himself to draw freely just because it was secret; not only do many of the recurrences and fervours already and independently noted in the plays crystallise round the idea as it has now been expressed; but hundreds of

other words, phrases, and passages start from their contexts and leap to the same marshalling. Shakespeare's use of the word "Nature," for example, is very definite. By "Nature" he means the present world, the world of the phenomenal and phantasmagoric, as distinct from the unknown or supernatural. "We, poor fools of Nature," is his expression for mankind, or the human race, in *Hamlet*; and so in other places. Then the very frequency of the words Time, Death, and their cognates, in his vocabulary, betrays the incessant running of his thought upon these themes. But let us in conclusion bring forward out of the Plays and Poems a group of additional and very specific illustrations.

Both Time and Death, we have seen, are personified in the Sonnets, are thought of and spoken of as churlish and malevolent entities. But they had been personified in Shakespeare's imagination with equal vividness and with the same kind of abhorrence before the Sonnets were written. There is a long apostrophe to Death in the *Venus and Adonis*, and there is a longer apostrophe to Time in the *Lucrece*,

showing that in 1593 and 1594, or in Shakespeare's thirtieth year, if not before, the personification of these two names for destruction and mutability, with a kind of loathing of both, was one of his fixed habits of thought. The passages start out from the two poems so prominently, and, with all Shakespeare's art of weaving them in, have such a character of bold irrelevancy to any real necessities of the mere stories in which they are inserted, that one feels they are there because Shakespeare was determined that they should be.

DEATH

VENUS, *fearing that* ADONIS *has been killed by the boar, exclaims:*

"Hard-favour'd tyrant, ugly, meagre, lean,
Hateful divorce of love"—thus chides she Death,—
"Grim-grinning ghost, earth's worm, what dost thou mean
To stifle beauty and to steal his breath,
Who when he lived, his breath and beauty set
Gloss on the rose, smell to the violet?"

There is more in the same strain; but that is the substance.

TIME

LUCRECE, *after apostrophising Night and Opportunity, apostrophises Time:*

"Mis-shapen Time, copesmate of ugly Night,
Swift subtle post, carrier of grisly care,
Eater of youth, false slave to false delight,
Base watch of woes, sin's packhorse, virtue's snare,
Thou nursest all and murder'st all that are:
O, hear me then, injurious, shifting Time!
Be guilty of my death, since of my crime."

. . . . .

"Thou ceaseless lackey to eternity."

Can passages like these, coming where they do, be anything else than elaborations by Shakespeare of his favourite ideas? He takes the two chief jewels from his box, and tries their look in these particular settings.

In the plays the theme of Death is one of incessant recurrence, and one that almost always excites Shakespeare to keen expression or rouses him to a kind of wild, sad fervour.

Keeping to the chronology of the plays, let me recall a few of the passages dedicated to this theme.

In *King John* there is an outburst from

Constance in her grief for her Arthur, beginning:

"Death, death: O amiable lovely death!
Thou odoriferous stench! sound rottenness!
Arise forth from the couch of lasting night,
Thou hate and terror to prosperity,
And I will kiss thy detestable bones
And put my eyeballs in thy vaulty brows
And ring these fingers with thy household worms
And stop this gap of breath with fulsome dust
And be a carrion monster like thyself:
Come, grin on me, and I will think thou smilest
And buss thee as thy wife. Misery's love,
O, come to me!"

Known to everyone is the great passage in *Richard II* where the King gives vent to his despair:

"Of comfort no man speak:
Let's talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs;
Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth,
Let's choose executors and talk of wills:
And yet not so, for what can we bequeath
Save our deposed bodies to the ground?
Our lands, our lives and all are Bolingbroke's,
And nothing can we call our own but death
And that small model of the barren earth
Which serves as paste and cover to our bones.
For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground

And tell sad stories of the death of kings:
How some have been deposed; some slain in war
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed;
Some poison'd by their wives; some sleeping killed;
All murder'd: for within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps Death his court, and there the antic sits
Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
To monarchize, be feared and kill with looks,
Infusing him with self and vain conceit,
As if this flesh which walls about our life
Were brass impregnable, and humour'd thus
Comes at the last and with a little pin
Bores through his castle wall, and farewell king!"

The speech in *Romeo and Juliet* may be cited, where Juliet, when Friar Laurence hints to her that there is a desperate plan by which she may be restored to Romeo, if she has courage for it, declares that, for that end, she will dare anything:

"Chain me with roaring bears:
Or shut me nightly in a charnel-house
O'er-cover'd quite with dead men's rattling bones,
With reeky shanks and yellow chapless skulls;
Or bid me go into a new made grave
And hide me with a dead man in his shroud;
Things that, to hear them told, have made me tremble."

And, when the plan is carried out, and Juliet, having taken the sleeping-draught, is lying actually in the charnel-house, in the tomb of the Capulets, and Romeo goes to find her there, what minuteness in all the descriptions of the circumstances of churchyards and tombs! There are the yew-trees in the dark; the ground is "loose, unfirm, with digging up of graves"; Romeo, advancing to the locked tomb with mattock and wrenching-iron, salutes it:

> "Thou detestable maw, thou womb of death,
> Gorged with the dearest morsel of the earth,
> Thus I enforce thy rotten jaws to open;"

and, when he is inside the tomb, and has slain Paris, and finds Juliet, as he thinks, dead where she lies, what outcry against Death, "the lean abhorred monster"!

The same fascinated familiarity with the theme of Death, and with all the circumstance of graveyards and burial, reappears even more memorably in the grave-digging scene in *Hamlet.*

Again, how thrillingly keen and solemn that colloquy between brother and sister in *Mea-*

sure for Measure, in which the brother would suggest the saving of his own life at the expense of his sister's shame:

Claudio. Death is a fearful thing.
Isabella. And shamed life a hateful.
Claudio. Ay, but to die and go we know not where;
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendant world; or to be worse than worst
Of those that lawless and incertain thoughts
Imagine howling: 'tis too horrible!
The weariest and most loathed worldly life
That age, ache, penury and imprisonment
Can lay on nature is a paradise
To what we fear of death."

More soothing, but still sad, is the death song in *Cymbeline:*

"Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages:
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

Fear no more the frown o' the great;
Thou art past the tyrant's stroke;
Care no more to clothe and eat;
To thee the reed is as the oak:
The sceptre, learning, physic, must
All follow this, and come to dust.

Fear no more the lightning-flash,
Nor the all-dreaded thunder-stone;
Fear not slander, censure rash;
Thou hast finish'd joy and moan:
All lovers young, all lovers must
Consign to thee, and come to dust."

No reader of competent feeling, or even of competent literary acuteness, can cross these and other such passages in Shakespeare's plays, and dismiss them as mere casual efforts of the poet to insert what was suitable for the situation. It is surely possible to recognise them s recurring fervours on a great constitutional logic, and additional proofs that Shakespeare's mind had acquired, in even inordinate degree, that metaphysical habit, that necessary and ultimate form of all human philosophising, which may be defined as a meditation of Death.

But even more curious and convincing for some may be the following passages, where it

is less the thought of Death, with all its morbid circumstance of graves and graveyards, than the cognate Time-feeling itself, in its purer and more subtle intellectual form, that is seen twining its influence through Shakespeare's conceptions and language:

"Time is the nurse and breeder of all good."
Two Gentlemen of Verona.

"O God! methinks it were a happy life
To be no better than a homely swain:
To sit upon a hill as I do now,
To carve out dials quaintly, point by point,
Thereby to see the numbers how they run,
How many make the hour full complete:
How many hours bring about the day;
How many days will finish up the year;
How many years a mortal man may live.
When this is known, then to divide the times:
So many hours must I tend my flock;
So many hours must I take my rest;
So many hours must I contemplate;
So many hours must I sport myself:
So many days my ewes have been with young;
So many weeks ere the poor fools will yean;
So many years ere I shall shear the fleece:
So minutes, hour, days, months, and years,
Passed over to the end they were created,
Would bring white hairs unto a quiet grave."
King Henry VI, Part III.

"Old time the clock-setter, that bald sexton Time."

King John.

"When, spite of cormorant, devouring Time,
The endeavour of this present breath may buy
That honour which shall bate his scythe's keen edge
And make us heirs of all Eternity."

Love's Labour's Lost.

"From the old days of goodman Adam to the pupil age of this present twelve o'clock at midnight."

Henry IV, Part I.

"But thought's the slave of life, and life's Time's fool;
And Time, that takes survey of all the world,
Must have a stop."

Henry IV, Part I.

Jaques. I met a fool i' the forest,
A motley fool: a miserable world!
As I do live by food, I met a fool;
Who laid him down and basked him in the sun,
And railed on Lady Fortune in good terms,
In good set terms and yet a motley fool.
"Good-morrow, fool," quoth I. "No, sir," quoth he;
"Call me not fool till heaven hath sent me fortune:"
And then he drew a dial from his poke,
And, looking on it with lack-lustre eye,
Says very wisely, "It is ten o'clock:
Thus we may see," quoth he, "how the world wags:
'Tis but an hour ago since it was nine,
And after one hour more 'twill be eleven:

And so, from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe,
And then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot;
And thereby hangs a tale."

As You Like It.

"When time is old and hath forgot itself,
When waterdrops have worn the stones of Troy,
And blind oblivion swallow'd cities up,
And mighty states characterless are grated
To dusty nothing."

Troilus and Cressida.

"The end crowns all,
And that old common arbitrater, Time,
Will one day end it."

Troilus and Cressida.

Time (as Chorus). I, that please some, try all, both joy and terror
Of good and bad, that makes and unfolds error,
Now take upon me, in the name of Time,
To use my wings. Impute it not a crime
To me or my swift passage, that I slide
O'er sixteen years and leave the growth untried
Of that wide gap, since it is in my power
To o'erthrow law and in one self-born hour
To plant and o'erwhelm custom. Let me pass
The same I am, ere ancient'st order was,
Or what is now received: I witness to
The times that brought them in; so shall I do
To the freshest things now reigning and make stale
The glistering of this present."

Winter's Tale.

To these let me add yet one other, and very curious, passage. It is curious because, as if to show the strength of the Time-feeling in Shakespeare, it exhibits him actually using the language of time in order to convey an idea of space, or translating a space-conception into a time-conception. It occurs in *Coriolanus*, where a messenger enters the public place in Rome, where the citizens are gathered, and brings the rumour that the banished Marcius, *i.e.* Coriolanus, is on his way to Rome at the head of a large army, with the Volscian general Aufidius, to take revenge. The revenge is to be vast, tremendous: and how does the messenger express this fact?

> "It is spoke freely out of many mouths—
> How probable I do not know—that Marcius,
> Join'd with Aufidius, leads a power 'gainst Rome,
> And vows revenge *as spacious as between*
> *The young'st and oldest thing.*"

Having, in this quest of the characteristics of Shakespeare's mind through his writings, run him up so definitely into what I have called the metaphysical mood, and even into a form of this mood which has been described as an

inordinate strength in the feeling of Death and Time, I would in conclusion ask any reader not to make too much of this result, or of any of the specifications of peculiarities in Shakespeare which preceded it. He is a vast and complex being: his Plays and Poems are perhaps the richest and most varied mass from the genius of one man in the total literature of the world. Read them, enjoy them, let them play into you; let each of them, and every part of each of them, produce its own natural and proper effect—the tragic, the comic, or the historic; dash the Falstaff in them duly into the Hamlet; mark the passages that affect you most, get them by heart, revert to them again and again. To read Shakespeare so, to read him almost anyhow, is a liberal education. Best, in the main, I should say, to read him with nothing intervening between one's own intelligence and the plain, clear, printed text. Commentaries and criticisms are, doubtless, useful; and one has to range somewhat among such, in order to feel abreast of the Shakespeare subject academically: but it is not well to strap oneself up too much in any

such leather bandages in one's own readings of him for pure enjoyment in summer days or in winter evenings.

As to what has been said in these pages, enough if it leave the impression that Shakespeare, universal as he was, Proteus-like as he was, had his characteristics as other people have, did possess a physiognomy which was distinctly his own and no one else's.

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